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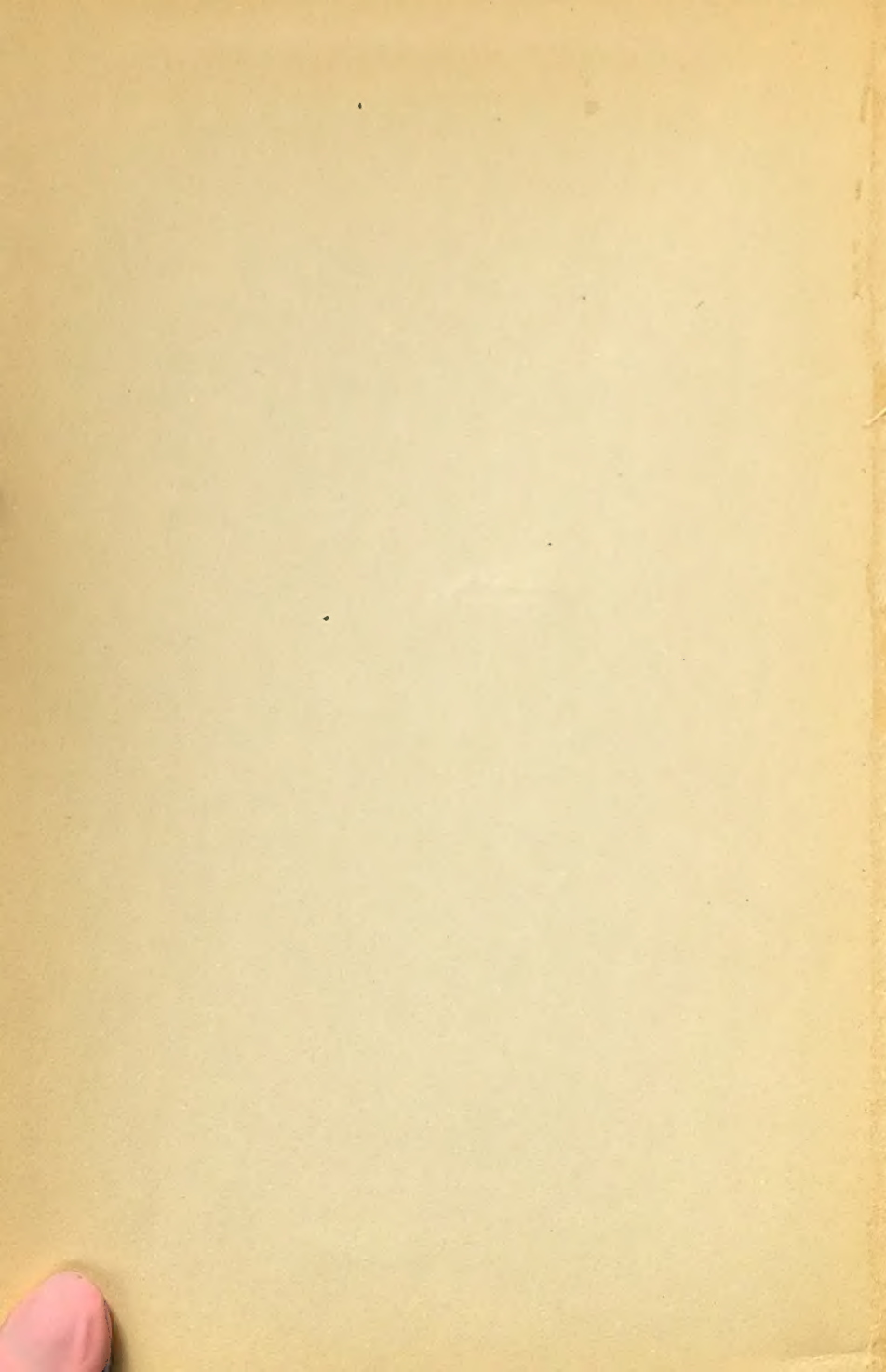
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FRENCH STUDIES  
AND REVIEWS

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XVIIIth CENTURY  
A BOOK OF CHARACTERS  
CHODERLOS DE LACLOS'S LIAI-  
SONS DANGEREUSES  
THE MYSTERY OF THE NATIVITY  
(XVth CENTURY)

# FRENCH STUDIES AND REVIEWS

BY  
RICHARD ALDINGTON



LINCOLN MACVEAGH  
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*General*



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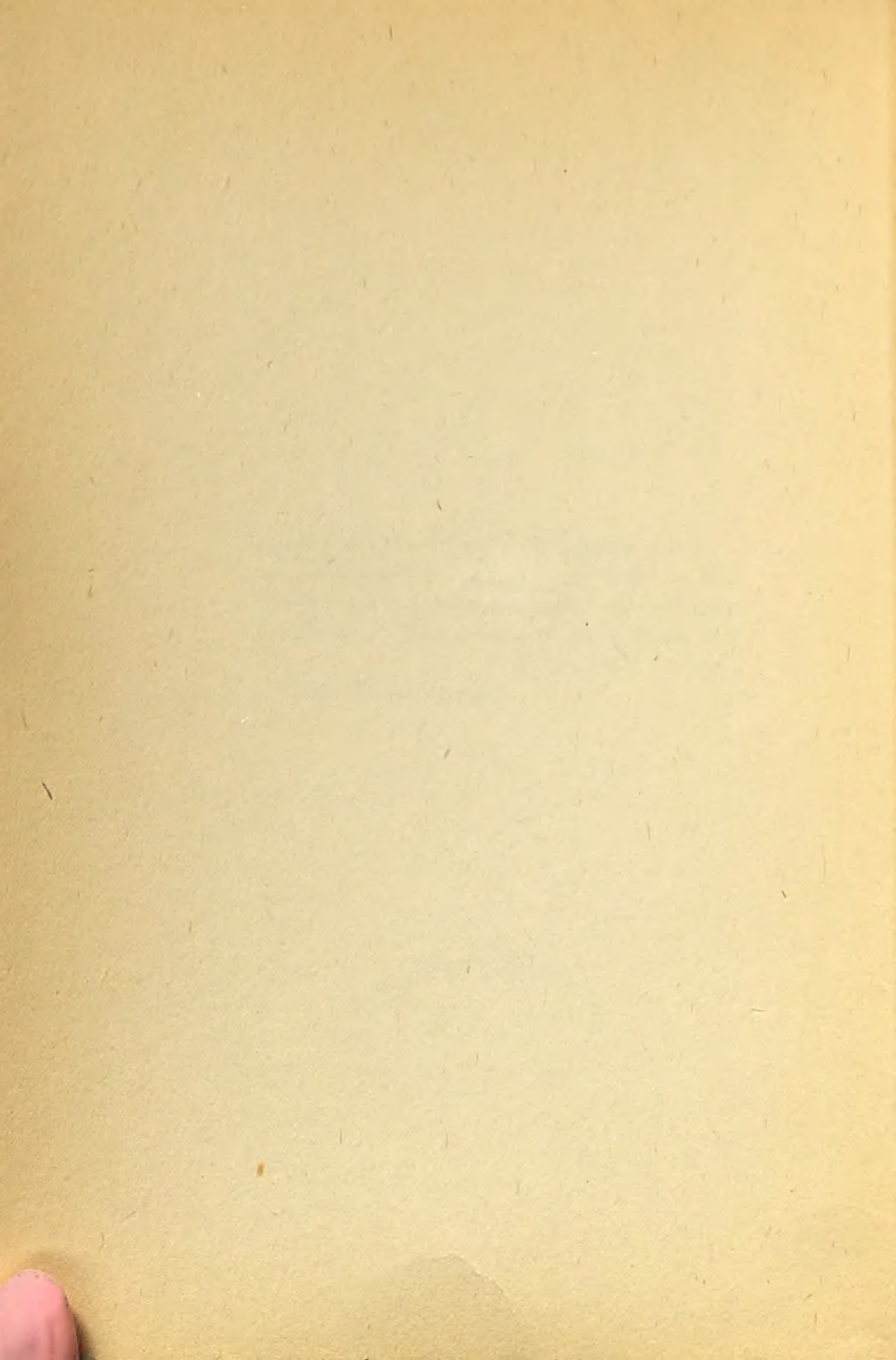
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As for wisdom, these figures will not teach you to make any better knives, or scissors, or chintzes ; and it is in the making of those things that the English show their wisdom. But God is great ! God is great !

LAYARD'S "Nineveh."



*The following pieces are reprinted from The Times Literary Supplement and The Criterion. Acknowledgment is made to the editors, to both of whom I am greatly indebted.*





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# French Studies and Reviews

## I

### MEDIEVAL FRENCH LIFE

THERE are roughly two popular notions of the Middle Ages. One is ultimately derived from the ideas of Gibbon, Voltaire and Hume, fortified by the narrow prejudices of the industrial age; it looks on the Middle Ages as a period of turbulence, superstition, slavery and ignorance. The other less common view is one of exaggerated idealization. Enthusiasts, fascinated by the beauty of the great cathedrals, the majesty of the Church, the imposing structures of scholastic philosophy, the apparent social order, the innumerable great men, would have us abandon all the achievements of the Renaissance and the industrial revolution and return to the golden age of Saint Louis. The truth lies somewhere between the contempt of the eighteenth-century *philosophes* and the enthusiasm of the Romantics, and to be redeemed from these errors we cannot do better



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than sit at the feet of specialists like M. Langlois and Miss Joan Evans, who arrange expert knowledge in popular form.

Their books are mutually complementary and correct each other. Both set out to give an account of life in medieval France; but whereas Miss Evans tends rather to the idealistic view, M. Langlois inclines strongly to realism. Miss Evans arranges her material in a consecutive narrative under headings like Feudal Society, Monastic Life, Pilgrimage and Crusade, and the like. M. Langlois follows the method already used in a former book compiled from medieval novelists. His object is not to arrange information in a more or less arbitrary manner, but to put us directly in contact with records of medieval life. Naturally, his book to a slight extent overlaps Miss Evans's, since both refer to the same sources; but Miss Evans attempts to give a series of general pictures of the Middle Ages, while M. Langlois limits himself to recording what he has found in certain selected moralists of his period. Thus M. Langlois's book gives a greater sense of direct contact with medieval life, while Miss Evans's provides more satisfactory explanations of medieval civilization.

M. Langlois has taken the works of twelve moralists, from the twelfth to the fourteenth century. He prefaces each with a short biographical

## MEDIEVAL FRENCH LIFE

and critical study embodying the most accurate and recent research. He then gives a *précis* of the work, with carefully annotated quotations of all the relevant passages, much as a university lecturer would do. His book is, in fact, a collection of twelve entertaining lectures, which spare the auditor the tedium of so much medieval writing and yet present a clear and coherent picture of manners. Against M. Langlois's method it might be urged that moralists are not always unprejudiced witnesses; the moralist is usually elderly, *laudator temporis acti*, not always brimming with the milk of human kindness, much given to shaking of the head and wagging of the monitory finger. It is not surprising, therefore, that M. Langlois seems to insist rather upon those characteristics which are common to man in all historical periods, while Miss Evans directs attention to traits which are exclusively medieval. Change and decay, luxury and tyranny of the upper classes, corruption of the Church and Churchmen, decline of learning, wantonness of women and their outrageous fashions, misery, sloth, and insolence of the working classes, the good old times, the flood of *parvenus*—these are the common topics of M. Langlois's twelve moralists. For Miss Evans medieval France is “the true heir of Rome in law, in clear thinking, in philosophy; in the urbanity of her civilization, in the relation between social function and position,

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and in the fitting pageantry that lends splendour to practical things." The illustrations to her book, magnificent examples of medieval art, are in contrast to the purely documentary illustrations given by M. Langlois.

Etienne of Fougères, chaplain to Henry II of England, composed a "*Livre des Manières*," dedicated to the Countess of Hereford. "*Veine est la joie de cest monde*" is Etienne's theme. Kings, counts and barons, archdeacons, deans and clerks, all fall miserably short of their responsibilities—"Where, O Lord, is Thy thunder?" Even King Henry wastes in hunting and other sports that precious time which should be given to securing justice for his subjects. The Church even is sullied with simony and concubinage (Bishops are exempted from this denunciation, but Etienne was himself a Bishop); the knights oppress the people ("chivalry has sadly degenerated nowadays") and think only of pleasure and of defrauding the Church of her tithes. Miserable is the serf; he labours and the fruit of his labour is taken from him—

Ne mangera ja de bon pain ;  
Nos en avons le meillor grain  
Et le plus bel et le plus sein.  
La droe remeint au vilain—

tradesmen cheat ; they water their wine, sell rabbit

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skin as fox, cheap wood as precious, shoddy as good cloth. And then the women ! The "riches fames" are extravagant and coquettes ; they scorn their husbands, but paint their faces and mew their fine feathers like hawks for their paramours. They go to church only to make assignations—and this is the cause of the decay of the nobility, by introducing confusion of lineage. But "the beauty of the body is a fragile thing," and Etienne has a vision of the damned souls of these ladies devoured by "toads, snakes and turtles." Well, that is no doubt true ; but even the villein's life had its brighter side, as Miss Evans shows us in this charming descriptive passage, based on the old illuminated calendars :

January is a month of rest and feast days ; he drinks in peace. February is a dull month ; he sits by the fire to dry himself after his work. In March he tends the vines. April is for him, as for the noble, the best month in the year, "*Biau fut li tans, resplandissant li jor*," and the villein sees the corn sprout and prunes the vine. In May, while the gentleman walks, and hunts and hawks, the villein rests in the shade. In June he is busy with the hay-making, in July and August with the harvest, and in September with the vintage. In October the wine is made and the sowing is done ; in November he takes the pigs to gather acorns in the forest, and gets in his own store of wood for the winter ; and then at Christmas there is once more feasting.

That sounds very delightful and idyllic. Lingering over this and other passages in Miss Evans's book,

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and in the fitting pageantry that lends practical things." The illustrations are magnificent examples of medieval art in contrast to the purely documentary illustrations by M. Langlois.

Etienne of Fougères, chaplain to the King of England, composed a "*Livre des Rois*" dedicated to the Countess of Hereford. The "*joie de cest monde*" is Etienne's picture of counts and barons, archdeacons, and knights, all fall miserably short of their duty. "Where, O Lord, is Thy thunder?" asks Henry wastes in hunting and in idleness, precious time which should be spent in doing justice for his subjects. The Church is riddled with simony and concubinage (Bishop of Hereford); the knights oppress the poor (Bishop of Bath); the king has sadly degenerated nowadays from his former state of pleasure and of defrauding his subjects of tithes. Miserable is the serf; his labour and the fruit of his labour is taken from him.

Ne mangera ja de bon  
Nos en avons le meil  
Et le plus bel et le  
La droe remeint au

tradesmen cheat; they water





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one cannot help feeling that the medieval villeins had some advantages over the modern proletariat. Speaking of Provençal life, she says it had "something of the Italian feeling of the Renaissance; the country surrounds the town, and the citizens go, Italian fashion, to work or to play there in the day, and return singing to the city at nightfall." Let us look for the other side of the picture. Poverty is the theme of the anonymous minstrel who wrote "Li Proverbe au Vilain" about 1190. The poor man is worse esteemed "qu'uns chiens"; he has neither wit nor strength, neither friend nor help; he never laughs from the heart, values not his life, and has no refuge but that temporary oblivion "quand il est bien ivres." Our minstrel observes many things wrong with the world: fine ladies who prefer "base fellows" to "seigneurs de chastel," and give their husbands' money to some "bon bachelier, pour mieux avoir s'amour"; families ruined by prodigal sons; insolence of *parvenus* (low-class people enriched by the plunder of the Crusades or by profiteering in war supplies); insatiability of money-lenders. Chance, says our minstrel, plays a large part in human life, and Fortune persecutes the unlucky; Fate and the world's judgments are unjust, egoism is universal, and human nature is not to be changed by education. Seek, then, measure in all things; scrape together a little money, do not despise

## MEDIEVAL FRENCH LIFE

small gains, never lend to anyone, get rid of poor relatives, be not too indulgent to wives and children, trust no man. Here surely is very "modern" wisdom, that harshly limited wisdom of those who see the world only as a gigantic shop where bargains are hard driven and profits are small.

Against that vulgar view of life we can set the noble figure of St. Louis; against the cheating tradesmen and the wanton women and the miserable villeins we can set the enthusiastic Crusaders and the merry pilgrims. Miss Evans quotes a delightful description of pilgrims from the "Roman du Mont St. Michel":

The day was clear without much wind. The maidens and the young men each of them said verse or song; even the old start singing again; all have a look of joy. Who knows no more sings "Outree! or "God help!" or "Asusee!" The minstrels there where they go have all brought viols, and go playing lays and songs. The weather is fine and the joy great. The palfreys and the chargers, the hackneys and the packhorses which amble along the road which the pilgrims follow, go neighing on all sides for the great joy they have. Even in the woods all the little birds sing, great and small.

And the passage concludes with an evocation of comfortable plenty, wines, bread, pasties, fruit, fish, birds, cakes, venison. From the pilgrimages grew up the marvellous epics called *chansons de gestes*—the Guillaume d'Orange cycle from the Compostella

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pilgrimage, the songs of Roland "from the Crusades of the men of Burgundy and Provence who followed in Charlemagne's footsteps to fight the Saracens." Who can forget the heroism and religious fervour of the Crusaders to the Holy Sepulchre, that cry of "Diex lo vot!" which ran through France when Urban preached the Crusade, and thousands of knights left lands, lady and life for Christ's sake: "Ha Diex! Adont i ot maintes larmes plorees"?

The minstrel, Guiot de Provins—monk, wanderer, crusader—the good knight, Hughes de Berzé (or de Bracy) shall show us another side. The "Bible Guiot" was composed about 1206. Its first line is "Dou siecle puant et horrible"—the stinking, horrible age we live in! Everything (it seems) goes from bad to worse, this is the beginning of the end, the lords nowadays are not what they were in the time of Richard the Lion-Heart and "li rois Loëis." The nobility is decayed. Some of them protect usurers and some even practise usury themselves! As for the Church:

Rome est la doix [*source*] de la malice  
Dont sordent tuit li malvés vice,  
C'est un viviers pleins de vermine.  
Contre l'Escripture divine  
Et contre Deu sont tuit lor fet.

The lawyers will plead for any cause, just or unjust, if they are paid for it; they envy each other, and

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there is not an honest man among them. As for medical men, “honiz est qui chiet en lor mains”—a man is lost who falls into their hands. They are rightly called “fisiciens,” because the word begins with “fi.” In Guiot’s opinion fat capons and a bottle of generous wine are worth all their ginger and diadragum and diamargariton and hellebore.

Hughes de Berzé composed his “Bible” some time after the fourth Crusade. He tells us he is old and has travelled much, life is passing away, and the ills the flesh is heir to make long life undesirable. But it was not always so; “once upon a time”

Il soloit estre uns tans jadis  
Que li siecles estoit jolis  
Et plains d’aucune vaine joie . .  
Solaz de rire et de chanter  
Et de tornoier et d’errer  
Et de cors [*cours*] mander et tenir. . . .

The Seigneur de Berzé has seen the world and knows it better than any priest or “hermite.” At Constantinople he saw four emperors “basely slain” in the space of eighteen months; he has seen the bodies of great warriors eaten by dogs and ravens; he saw the Crusaders triumph when they were “humbles vers Dieu,” but God punished them when they forgot Him and plunged themselves in riches, “emeralds, rubies, purple, lands, gardens, palaces, ladies—dont il i en ot molt de belles.” It will be a



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sore marvel if God forgives us our many sins. Hughes de Berzé is particularly perturbed by that sin men call Amor. It is evil to sin with an ugly lady, but more "delicieux" with a fair lady; the latter is consequently harder to forget, and it is particularly sinful to remember the love "de sa tres belle amie" and her "biau gent cors." And so the memory of some "dear, dead woman" takes the Crusader's thoughts away from the great deeds at Zara and Constantinople, until he catches himself up with a little final prayer :

Aiez de moi merci, biaux Sire,  
Et ne monstrez vers moi vostre ire.

Thus in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (as in the twentieth) a fair woman might prove an irresistible temptation from duty. Miss Evans does not tell us much about the medieval woman, her faults, virtues, attractions and sins. She quotes from Guibert de Nogent one of the perpetual diatribes against women's clothes and "unseemly mirth," "winking eyes," "babbling tongues," "wanton gait," and the like. She gives a charming description from the "Ménagier de Paris" of what a young citizen's wife ought to be, and draws on poetic literature for various glimpses of the life of women. She does not refer to that curious work of misogyny, the "Lamentations of Mahieu the Bigame," so charac-

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## MEDIEVAL FRENCH LIFE

teristic of the medieval clerk's attitude towards women, the Gallic and *bourgeois* answer to the idealism of Provence and chivalry.

The bigamy of this Mahieu (fl. 1300) was not bigamy in our sense; he was a bigamist because as a clerk he had married a widow. As he points out, it was illogical and unjust to break a man's life for a comparatively venial offence, when a "cler" who was careful to "grease the hand" of his superior might keep a "hundred concubines" if he wanted. Mahieu was brought to misery and want by a woman and therefore pens these Lamentations as a warning to others. His remarks on widows would have earned the warmest approbation from the elder Mr. Weller. Not only is marriage unhealthy ("les noces amenuyest les vertus d'omme"), but a man is forced to buy a pig in a poke; widows are particularly detestable, as Mahieu well knows, having unfortunately married a widow, Perette, for her looks and found her a rare shrew. Three days after a man is dead his widow is in pursuit of a new husband, "with silk dresses, false hair and rouge." Saint Acaire (wise man!) said he would rather look after raving lunatics than widows. Women are gossips, curious, disobedient, envious, greedy, wanton, hypocritical, superstitious, unable to keep a secret, cruel; in short, no woman is ever satisfied, and there is no wife without strife. Mahieu,

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then, like Job, turns upon God and accuses Him of having fabricated this monster, Woman; in fact, while Mahieu is on the subject, he may as well point out to the Creator that His work is filled with defects. Follows a (then) most daring criticism of Divine providence. God replies to Mahieu in orthodox terms, and Mahieu expresses himself as satisfied; God then shows him a vision of Paradise, where the martyrs of marriage occupy conspicuous seats—"Vecy, vecy le vray martir!"

Against Mahieu and his like we can set a multitude of poets and poetizing noblemen, both in the *langue d'oc* and the *langue d'oïl*. The Crusader parted from his wife or mistress with a bitter pang. Joinville has described in his simple vivid prose the departure, but his thoughts turn rather to his "fair castle" and his "two children" than to his wife. Conon de Béthune, who loved some fair lady *par amours*, laments in this wise:

Ahi! Amors, com dure departie  
Me convenra faire de la millor  
Ki onques fust amee ne servie!  
Dieus me ramaint a li par sa douçour,  
Si voirement con j'en part a dolor!  
Las! k'ai je dit? Ja ne m'en part je mie!  
Se li cors va servir Nostre Signor,  
Mes cuers remaint del tot en sa baillie.

So the lady kept the knight's heart while our Lord  
had only his body.

## MEDIEVAL FRENCH LIFE

Miss Evans and M. Langlois's moralists are in agreement at least in one respect, and that is the great misery of the realm of France after the beginning of the Hundred Years War and the Black Death of 1348. The heroic period of French medieval civilization came to an end with the ruin brought about by the English invaders. France recovered, it is true, but the noble France of Saint Louis gave place to the cunning France of Louis XI.

The countryside was pillaged [says Miss Evans], the towns were sacked and burned, transport and communication were at an end, and prosperity and security vanished. The chronicler tells us that after Poitiers "the affairs of the realm went from bad to worse, the public weal came to an end, and brigands appeared on every side. The nobles hate and despise the villeins; they care no more for the good of the King or of their vassals; they oppress and despoil the peasants of their villages. . . . From this day the land of France, hitherto glorious and honoured throughout the world, became the laughing-stock of other nations."

Yet even in 1319 things appeared to be taking a sinister turn to the Grocer of Troyes, who wrote an enormous poem, about 30,000 lines long, about everything. The Grocer was a democrat and denounced the great caustically. However, he was fully aware of the faults of the people. There is a strangely familiar ring about this speech which he puts into the mouth of a tiler :

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When I finally make up my mind to work, I take with me a young mate who knows nothing of the job, but I insist on his being paid the full wage of twelve *deniers*. When, at last, I get on the roof, I lay one tile in the time it should take to lay eight or ten. I ease off and sing a song, then take a siesta between two slopes of the roof. It is then time to knock off for dinner. After that, it is soon supper time, so we leave work for that day. Of course, with piece-work it is different ; I can do as much in one day as in five days by the hour.

But the really depressed and depressing moralist is Gilles li Muisis, or Giles the Mouldy, who dictated his poems about the year 1350. The Abbé Gilles is eighty ; he has been blind, but has now recovered his sight a little ; but he might almost as well have remained blind, for what does he see ? The workmen do nothing but wait for the time to cease work. Impossible to build nowadays with wages what they are. The working classes, men and women, are thoroughly out of hand and only want to eat and drink at taverns, dance, sing and amuse themselves. (As the old Berkshire peasant said over his Bank Holiday pint of beer—" That's what the gentry don't like to see, the poor man enjoyin' of hisself ! ") The old customs are going, the religious orders are decadent, the Church is in servitude, the poor dress themselves like the rich, there is no longer any difference between mistress and servant, children are ill-bred and swear without being smacked for it by anyone, there are no more tournaments and



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jousts, the currency is depreciated, the cost of living is terribly high, people have taken to wearing buttons on their clothes, carrying purses, wearing silver thongs and silk hoods, there are drunkards in the streets. "Li siècle ni vault riens," and the new fashions of women and the behaviour of girls nowadays baffle description.

Neither of these books covers more than a portion of the subject undertaken. M. Langlois has arbitrarily limited himself to the information contained in twelve vernacular writers, so that great achievements like Church architecture, scholastic philosophy, and the Crusades are either not mentioned or underestimated. Some of these moralists verge on satire, and all their denunciations and laments must not be taken too seriously. Miss Evans has attempted a more systematic survey of French medieval life, but the mere fact of attempting a general view of the main aspects prevents anything like the wealth of picturesque and accurate detail contained in M. Langlois's large and closely printed volume. Yet Miss Evans deserves praise for the skill with which she has traced these main outlines, the taste and intelligence she shows in presenting her material. Enthusiasm and learning, controlled by good sense and good taste, will nearly always produce a readable book. As an introduction, a stimulus to the study of medieval France, Miss Evans's book should be of

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great use. M. Langlois expects of his readers some knowledge of early French, but his texts are lavishly annotated; they would make a very pleasant beginning for anyone who was desirous of making a first attack on the immense and fascinating vernacular literature of medieval France.

“La Vie en France au Moyen Age, de la fin du XII<sup>e</sup> au milieu du XIV<sup>e</sup> Siècle, d’après les Moralistes du temps,” par Ch. V. Langlois. (Paris: Hachette.)

“Life in Medieval France,” by Joan Evans. (Oxford: University Press. London: Milford.)

## II

### FRENCH CRUSADERS

#### I

THE anonymous "Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum" is a document of the greatest importance for the history of the First Crusade, and has lately for the first time been published with a modern French translation *en regard*. The book exists in several manuscripts, and was first published in 1612; it was republished in the large "Recueil des historiens des Croisades" (1866), and with elaborate notes by a German scholar in 1890. Curiously enough, for many years this history was thought to be a plagiarism of a history of a journey to Jerusalem written between 1102 and 1111 by Tudebode, a priest of Poitou, who, like the anonymous author of the "Gesta Francorum," accompanied the First Crusade. Modern critical science has proved that Tudebode was the plagiary, and that the "Gesta Francorum" inspired a large number of medieval authors. These include Ekkehard, who in 1101 read the "Gesta" in Jerusalem; a certain Robert le Moine

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(1107); Baudri de Bourgueil, who in 1108 undertook to correct the author's style and, incidentally, fares no better than most other self-appointed improvers. Historians like Ordericus Vitalis and Raoul de Caen, poets like the author of the famous *Chanson d'Antioche* drew upon the "*Gesta*" as a first source.

This eye-witness's narrative was written by a Norman knight from Sicily attached to the fortunes of Bohemund of Otranto. Modern ingenuity has failed to discover this knight's name, and the theory that he was one Alexander, secretary to Stephen, Count of Blois, is now discarded. M. Bréhier thinks, from internal evidence, that the knight collaborated with a clerk who inserted a few flowery religious passages, numerous pious ejaculations, and fantastic libels on the enemy. It may be so, but none of these things appears to be outside the mentality of a Norman Crusader. These questions are of small importance in comparison with the intrinsic merit of the "*Gesta Francorum*." It gives us both an accurate account of the Crusade, written in part during the progress of the events it relates, and a naïve revelation of the state of mind of these primitive but subtle warriors. "Its qualities of precision and sincerity," remarks M. Bréhier, "make this anonymous account one of the fundamental sources for the history of the Crusades." It gives us an exact picture of the events of the Crusade, from the moment

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when the knight embarks with Bohemund (November, 1096) until the taking of Jerusalem and the victory of Ascalon (August, 1099). Nothing could illustrate better the mixture of fanaticism and love of adventure and gain which determined the attempt of the Crusaders than the knight's account of how Bohemund took the cross :

Bohemund the victorious was at the siege of Amalfi when he learned of the coming of an innumerable host of Franks resolved to journey to our Lord's Sepulchre, and ready to do battle with the pagans ; he sent to inquire exactly what weapons these people used in battle, what emblem of Christ they carried on their way, what war-cry they shouted in battle. He was answered : " They have weapons suitable for war ; on one shoulder or between their shoulders they wear the cross of Christ ; their cry, shouted in unison, is : ' God wills it ! God wills it ! ' " Straightway, moved by the Holy Ghost, Bohemund gave orders to cut up a valuable cloak he was wearing and distributed pieces of it shaped like a cross. Then the greater part of the knights who were besieging the town rushed impetuously to him, so that Count Roger was left almost alone, and the Count returned to Sicily lamenting that he had lost all his army.

Chronological details are given with a minute precision, and are in general confirmed by other chroniclers. The abundance and picturesqueness of the details give a remarkably vivid picture of the material and moral state of the Crusaders. As M. Bréhier enthusiastically but justly remarks, " the whole of the feudal society at the end of the eleventh



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century lives before our eyes " in this book. As the Crusaders passed through the Greek Empire on their way to Constantinople they attacked and burned a town and all its inhabitants, for the excellent theological reason that they were Manichæans. Nor were the Greeks exactly delighted when their cattle and fields were devastated to feed the pilgrims to the Sepulchre. More picturesque details than these inevitable occurrences in the movement of troops are given in the account of the siege of Nicæa. The road, we learn, was marked out by the pioneers with iron and wooden crosses; until the arrival of Bohemund the price of a loaf was twenty or thirty deniers, owing to scarcity of supplies; the Bishop of Puy was in command of part of the investing force; and when a relief army of Turks was defeated the soldiers of Christ amused themselves by shooting the heads of Turks into the town from slings.

We realize the ignorance of the Crusaders from many a naïve remark, such as "the devilish exclamation in their own tongue meaning I know not what," which is obviously the "Allah Akbar" of the Mahomedans; and "the many objects which we were ignorant of" found in the tents of the enemy. Another passage shows that the Crusaders were accompanied by women. Again and again we get vivid evidence of the sufferings and hardships of the invading army, deprived of its horses, without trans-

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port or supplies, and having to march through an arid country. The enemy was a formidable one, and if anything could increase one's admiration and respect for the great Norman race of this age, it is that they succeeded in their apparently hopeless invasion in spite of the fact that on more than one occasion (notably when shut up in Antioch) they were within a hair's-breadth of destruction. Our unknown knight reflects on the valour of his enemies in terms which would do honour to any hero :

I will speak truth [says he], and none will contest it : assuredly, if they had always firmly held the faith of Christ and of holy Christianity, if they would have confessed one God in three persons, a son of God born from the Virgin, who suffered, rose from the dead, ascended to Heaven in the sight of His disciples, sent the perfect consolation of the Holy Ghost : if they would have believed with true faith and judgment that He reigns in Heaven and on earth, their equal in courage, power, and knowledge of war could never be found. And yet, by God's grace, we beat them.

Our Crusader had something of the Englishman in him, and his joyous account of the storming of Antioch with scaling ladders is still a tale to keep old men from the chimney corner. The massacres and barbarities were indeed horrible, but to some extent are atoned for by the most heroic courage and by fearful hardships endured with faith and firmness. When the conquerors of Antioch were themselves

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blockaded in the corpse-strewn streets of the city, we read :

These profane enemies of God held us so straitly blockaded in Antioch that many died of hunger. A small loaf cost a bezant ; I will not mention wine. Horse and ass flesh were sold and eaten ; a chicken cost fifteen sous, an egg two sous, a nut a denier. Everything was extravagantly dear ; the famine was so great that we cooked and ate the leaves of fig, vine, and thistle. Others cooked and ate the dried skins of horses, camels, cows and buffaloes. And these sufferings, which cannot be related, were endured in the name of Christ and to free a way to the Holy Sepulchre.

The finding of the sacred lance, through a vision seen by a monk in the army, steeled the Crusaders for fresh efforts. After immense labours and hardships they at length reached Jerusalem, and after a desperate siege captured the whole city. They fought with the last hopeless remnants of the Saracens "until the whole temple of Solomon streamed with blood" ; and then "the Crusaders rushed through the town, seizing gold, silver, horses, mules, and pillaging the houses which were filled with riches." Then comes the characteristic touch, with which we may take leave of our successful Crusader.

Then, in delight and weeping with joy, we went to adore the Sepulchre of our Saviour Jesus and to acquit our debt to Him. Next morning, we scaled the roof of the temple,

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attacked the Saracens, men and women, and decapitated them. Some threw themselves from the top of the temple.

### II

In addition to well-known works like the *Mémoires* of Villehardouin and Joinville certain minor records by French Crusaders are in existence. Like the "*Gesta Francorum*" they are first-hand narratives of extraordinary historical events, but their interest is as much personal and poetic as historical. Robert de Clari, or Clary, was a knight who at the end of the twelfth century owned a small fief, now at Cléry-les-Pernois, in the arrondissement of Doullens, in the department of the Somme. He and his brother, Aleaume, followed Pierre d'Amiens in 1201, and returned home at an uncertain date (possibly, the spring of 1205), bringing with him a relic from the imperial chapel of Constantinople, which is still preserved in a reliquary at Corbie. The inscription on the reliquary states that the relics :

. . . furent apportées de Constantinople, et qu'ils furent prises en la Sainte Chapelle à Buche de Lyon el palais l'empereur, et que Robillard de Clari les apporta en cil tems que li cuens Baudevins de Flandre en fust empereur.

Robert de Clari is supposed to have died about 1216. He appears to have been rather an ignorant

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man, exceedingly superstitious, jealous of the *rikes et haus homes*—the rich men and the leaders—but a good fighting man and an honest witness of what he saw. His book, “De Coustantinoble, comment ele fu prise,” is intensely interesting because it puts a reader in direct contact with the thoughts, motives, emotions, and acts of a minor personage in the fourth Crusade. With this old book in hand we may ponder on the strange fate which sent these soldiers and knights from North France on a course whereby, in the name of Jesus and the Holy Sepulchre, they sacked the Christian city of Constantinople, murdered numbers of the inhabitants, deposed the emperor, destroyed priceless works of ancient art, and quarrelled over the silver wash-bowls they stole from the Greek ladies.

Clari describes at some length the “gathering of the clans” for this military foray, preached by Maistres Foukes de Nuelli, and the modern reader is struck by the fact that the place-names of many of these knights are strangely familiar. Thus we find (to modernize the place names) Hues de Saint-Pol, Jakes d’Avesnes, Jehan de Noyon, Simon de Loos, Mahieus de Warlincourt, Nicholas de Mailly-Mailly, Conon de Béthune, and divers other names we have met with before. Clari’s account of the chaffering between the emissaries of the Crusaders (one of whom was Villehardouin) and the Venetians



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shows the soldier's impatience with the tedium of negotiations. At last the great day comes when the fleet and transport set sail from Venice and Clari describes the scene in vivid and enthusiastic words—for all their crabbed, obsolete quaintness—which I venture to give in English :

Then they settled upon their course and drew up their fleet ; and set out to sea. Each of the leaders [*haus homes*] had a ship for himself and his men and a horse-transport [*uissier*] for his horses, and the Doge of Venice had with him fifty galleys at his own charges. The galley he was in was crimson, and there was above him a canopy of crimson samite ; and four silver trumpets [*buisines*] sounded before him and drums that beat joyfully. And all the lords, and clerks and laymen, both high and low, felt such great joy at setting forth that such joy was never known in history, nor seen, nor heard of ; and the pilgrims made all the priests and clerks go up into the castellated poops [*as castiaus des nes*] to sing *Veni creator spiritus*. And all men both great and small wept with emotion [*de pec*] and with great joy. And when the fleet set out from the port of Venice, and . . . [*lacuna*] the dromonds and the rich ships and so many other boats, that it was the finest thing beheld since the beginning of the world for there were at least a hundred pair of trumpets, silver and bronze, which all sounded at the departure, and so many drums and tabours and other instruments that it was a marvel. When they were on the high sea and they threw out sails and banners and ensigns from the top of their castellated poops, they dashed forward and the sea swarmed with them and foamed with the ships they sent forward and their joy.

A wonderful description, far more impressive in the energetic original than in modern speech ; a

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wonderful departure and a wonderful moment in a man's life; a fortunate age when great collective emotions found immediate expression in this gorgeous pageantry of sound, colour, song and form—the high-pooped ships, the flat transports, the great Bucentaur and the Venetian galleys throwing into foam and tumult the Adriatic waves; the coloured sails and banners, knights' pennons, the great Banner of Saint Mark, and the Doge's canopy of crimson samite; the shrill noise of trumpets, the roll of drums, the music of viols and tabours, the solemn yet triumphant hymn sent up with all the majesty of Church ceremony. No wonder they “*plorarent de pec,*” for such an emotion never comes twice in a lifetime and hardly twice in a century. But this Crusade, which set out so auspiciously, never reached the Holy Land, never even came to grips with the infidel; on the contrary, seduced by their lusts and greed, the Crusaders (Simon de Montfort and Enguerrand de Boves alone dissenting) played into the hands of the commercial, astute Venetians and were used by “old blind Dandolo” to further the interests of the Serene Republic. After taking Zara, which was always so useful to Venice, the Crusaders turned towards Constantinople, under pretext of restoring a defrauded heir to the Empire. The Latin Empire of Constantinople, set up as a result of this Crusade, was undoubtedly a weakness in a great bulwark of

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Europe and prepared the way for the disastrous irruption of the Turks in the fifteenth century.

Out of many passages in Clari's narrative which delight a modern reader, one or two may be selected. He gives a deliciously naïve and imaginary account of an altercation between the Doge and the Emperor Alexis, part of which must for decency's sake be left in the obscurity of a learned language :

"Alexis, what art thou about ?" quoth the Doge, "Be-think ye, we took thee out of sore captivity and have made thee a lord and crowned thee emperor : wilt thou never keep," quoth the Doge, "our treaties, wilt thou do no more ?" "Nay," quoth the emperor, "I will do no more than I have !" "Non ?" dist li dux, "garchons malvais ! nous t'avons," fist li dux, "geté de le merde et en le merde te remeterons ; et je te desfi et bien saches tu que je te pourcacherai mal a men pooir de ches pas en avant !"

This invective smacks more of the camp-fire and the ranks than the conversation of grave and reverend signors. However, the result of this disagreement was that the Crusaders again besieged Constantinople. Clari describes vividly assaults, repulses, sallies, all the cumbrous methods of a medieval siege. On one occasion an assault of the Crusaders failed, and Clari gives us this amusing and most unexpected detail :

. . . quant li Griu les virent traire ariere, si s'acueillent a huer et a escrier si durement que trop, et monterent seur les murs et avaloient leur braies et moustroient leur leurs cus !

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Clari's version of the final assault gives the honour of effecting an entrance to his brother, a clerk. He passes over entirely all the miseries and horrors of the sack of the town, but his childish and barbarous mind is dazzled by the vast wealth accumulated as booty (*waains*), by the great buildings of Constantinople, the works of art, and the relics. Characteristically, he is ignorant of the meaning and value of the classic art still preserved in the town, and is only interested in works of a supposedly miraculous nature: much as an ignorant person of our own time is only interested in art which "looks life-like." Santa Sophia, the chapel of the Emperors, the church of the Apostles, chiefly struck his imagination; but he describes in his naïve way many other things we would give a lot to see, including the equestrian statue of Heraclius, and the Hippodrome with its wealth of statues, which (Clari assures us) "of old moved by magic, but nowadays never work." It is enough to make one despair of civilization to think of the last noble relics of classic Greek sculpture treated as examples of black magic and melted down to make bronze coins for these Frankish barbarians. No wonder "Messire Sains Dimitres" one morning entered the tent of Jehans li Blaks and slew him with a lance-blow through the heart, though the said Jehans was not a Crusader but a Slav king.

The slim pamphlet of letters referring to the

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**Crusade of Saint Louis (1249)** is less picturesque but not less interesting. It contains an account of the voyage of the French host and the taking of Damietta, written in Old French by Jean Arrode, the Chamberlain of Saint Louis, to Nicolas Arrode in France. Two shorter letters in medieval Latin follow: one from Robert Count of Artois to Blanche of Castille, the other from Jean de Beaumont, Chambrier de France, to Geoffroi de la Chapelle, Panetier de France. It seems marvellous that such casual documents should have been preserved through so many centuries, and it is surely remarkable that we possess any "soldiers' letters home" from the armies of the Crusades. The first-hand contact with events brings vividly to one's mind the strange mixture of sordidness, romance, heroism, cruelty, selfishness and devotion, virtue and crime, which made up the Crusades. These old French books give a new meaning to the silent effigies of cross-legged Crusaders which can still be seen in some of our churches and cathedrals—effigies which mark most valiant dust once animated by intense energy and fire.

"*Histoire Anonyme de la Première Croisade.*" Editée par Louis Bréhier. (Paris: Champion.)

"*Robert de Clari: La Conquête de Constantinople.*" Editée par Philippe Lauer. (Paris: Champion.)

"*Lettres Françaises du XIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle.*" "Jean Sarrasin: *Lettre à Nicolas Arrode.*" Editée par Alfred L. Foulet. (Paris: Champion.)



### III

## TWO TROUBADOURS

THERE would be some exaggeration in saying that study of Provençal poetry is a popular pursuit. It is rather an obscure region of European poetry, almost entirely abandoned to specialists. There is not much difficulty in accounting for this, and indeed not much hope of alteration. Most people have an erroneous conception of the troubadour: they think of him as a slender, romantic youth, in a plumed cap, slashed doublet, and striped hose, vociferating sentimental verse. This is quite unfair, a libel promulgated by Romantic operas and minor poets. A more serious difficulty is the *langue d'oc* itself. Anyone, with industry and a reasonable knowledge of classical French, can master for himself the various older forms of the *langue d'oïl*; but the *langue d'oc* is another thing. To the horrified beginner it looks like a fearful mixture of base Latin, mutilated Spanish, and old French, with many unnecessary consonants.

The worst obstacle to any general interest in the

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poetry of the troubadours is that no modern writer has yet convinced the public that Provençal poetry is really worth the trouble of study. The late Professor Ker, who had an immense knowledge of medieval literature, did not admire the troubadours very much, and Mr. Maurice Hewlett used them, in his inimitable way, only for picturesque effect. Perhaps the work of the American poet, Mr. Ezra Pound, has scarcely received its due. His translations, though disfigured by mannerisms and some inaccuracies, certainly suggest a subtle vein of poetry ; but even here the beauty is one of complexity and elegance of form rather than of matter. The most attractive of Mr. Pound's versions is the *Alba* (from the original of which Swinburne drew the refrain of "In the Orchard"), which begins :

In a garden where the whitethorn spreads her leaves  
My lady hath her love laid close beside her,  
Till the warder cries the dawn—Ah dawn that grieves  
Ah God ! Ah God ! That dawn should come so soon !

Please God that night, dear night, should never cease,  
Nor that my love should parted be from me,  
Nor watch cry "Dawn"—Ah dawn that slayeth peace !  
Ah God ! Ah God ! That dawn should come so soon !

In spite of a few charming things like this the mass of Provençal poetry seems a little empty and repetitive, especially in the minor poets, who rarely sing up to the sonorous level of their names. Peire

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de Valeria, Bernart Arnaut d'Armagnac, Giraut de Calanson, Jausbert de Pucibot, Guilhem de Cabestanh—such names carry grave responsibilities and demand the oblation of high deeds in arms or song. If a man is called or calls himself Cyrano de Bergerac he has got to do something to keep the panache waving. The Provençals were acutely aware of this. Mere medieval skirmishing and plundering were not enough; they had to go crusading or rival the King of Aragon *par amors* and essay the heights of poetry. This fact struck the Provençal biographers with particular force, and therefore they gave the picturesquely named poets most picturesque biographies, which modern *savants* unkindly treat as moonshine, and gravel the biographers with contemporary documents. "The old Provençal biography of Jausbert de Pucibot," says Mr. Shephard sternly, "est un véritable roman qui ne mérite aucune créance." In extenuation of the troubadours it must be pointed out that they were not subscribers to *Romania*, and therefore could not possibly know the truth about themselves. True or false, the biographies of the Provençals are their most interesting contribution to literature. The poems of Jausbert and Guilhem are not exciting; their biographies are both original and tragic.

Jausbert, or Jausbertz, was a monk and a gentleman, and well skilled in letters and in singing and

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in making poetry (*trobar*). And for the sake of a woman he left his monastery and betook himself to En Savaric de Malleon, who gave him the harness of a jongleur and clothes and a horse. Then Jausbert went to divers Courts and sang and made good songs; and he fell in love with a donzella gentil e bella and made songs for her, and she would not have him unless he was a knight. So Jausbert applied to En Savaric, and En Savaric (who must have been a rare fellow for a capitalist) made him a knight and gave him a dwelling (*alberc*) and land and an income, and so Jausbert married the donzella. Jausbert went off to the wars in Spain, and in his absence the donzella was seduced by an English knight and eloped with him, and then he abandoned her. Jausbert came back from Spain and went out one night *per voluntat de femna*; and it was told him that in a certain poor woman's house there abode a fair wench; and Jausbert went thither, and lo! it was his own wife. And when they saw each other they felt great grief and great shame; and the next day he took her to a convent and left her there, and for the depth of his grief and shame he forbore ever to sing or make poems.

Now, all Mr. Shephard can do for us is to identify Jausbert's monastery, several of Jausbert's friends and patrons, and the probable date of his *floruit* (1210-1220); and that is all. This is obviously a

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case where fiction is truer than fact, or at any rate a good deal stranger. The probability that the biography was "arranged" to fit Jausbert's slightly anti-feminine songs should not be allowed to spoil a good tale. But let us not sorrow too much for him; he was a philosopher, and asserts that whatever happens he never rejoices or grieves excessively :

Doncs qual que-m dei' avenir,  
No-m n'esjau fort ni-m n'azir.

There is nothing humanly improbable in the biography of Jausbert; but some genius invented such an excellently tragic and marvellous story for Guilhem de Cabestanh that we have at least four biographies, each "going one better" than the one before. The longest and most marvellous was translated by Stendhal in the fifty-second chapter of "De l'Amour," where it may be read in full. Briefly, the tale is this. Guilhem was the son of a poor knight and he was varlet to Monseignor Raimon de Rossillion, a most noble baron, whose wife, Dompna Margarida, was one of the fairest ladies of all Provence. And Guilhem behaved so well that in a weak moment the baron made him page (or donzel) to Dompna Margarida; and then, as was almost obligatory, Guilhem fell in love with the Dompna and she with him. And she granted him favours (which was against the rules of amor courtois),



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and he made songs for her. Then, to cut short and rather spoil the story, the husband found them out, in spite of their cunning and a rare device which was rendered useless by Margarida's jealousy of the lady Guilhem pretended to love in order to shield Margarida from calumny. Then was my lord Raimon wroth, and he carried Guilhem into the forest and upbraided him and slew him; then my lord cut off Guilhem's head and drew the heart from his body and put them in a hunting bag and carried them back to his castle. There he had the heart roasted and called his wife and made her good cheer and bade her eat; and she ate, not knowing what dire food her lord had given her. Then my lord showed her Guilhem's head and told her what she had eaten, and asked if the heart had been good to eat. But Dompna Margarida showed the strength of her love and the stoutness of her spirit, for she made answer that it was so good and so savoury that never any food or any drink would take from her mouth the taste of the heart of En Guilhem. Then my lord ran upon her with his sword, but she fled to the balcony and cast herself down, and her neck was broken.

But Mr. Arthur Långfors says there is complete evidence that this could not have happened to Dompna Margarida, and that there is no reason why the tragic story of the eaten heart should be attached

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to the gentle love poet, Guilhem de Cabestanh; which is a sad pity, for it is a good story and much more exciting than Guilhem's poems.

“Les Poésies de Jausbert de Puycibot, Troubadour du XIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle.” Editées par William P. Shephard. (Paris : Champion.)

“Les Chansons de Guilhem de Cabestanh.” Editées par Arthur Langfors. (Paris : Champion.)

#### IV

### EARLY FRENCH TEXTS

**T**HERE are few better ways of growing acquainted with Philippe de Commynes than through the pages of "Quentin Durward." Perhaps that is a heretical opinion, especially since the last edition of the "Mémoires" is part of a large series gravely entitled "Les Classiques de l'Histoire de France au Moyen-Age." Scientific history is apt to be a grim, worldly old hag; she would quench romance in Eden itself and will never suffer us to go hunting Golden Fleeces and Helens of Troy, for were not those expeditions trade wars disguised in clumsy fictions by foolish poets? One must therefore be very apologetic in expressing the opinion that one of Commynes's glories is that he inspired Scott. And is it not a midsummer madness of Romanticism to say that "Quentin Durward" reads like the brilliant, full-blooded original and the "Mémoires" like the pale, cold copy? Commynes was not a romantic figure; he was a shrewd, cautious, calculating political adviser. His memoirs are not romantic; for, however important in French history

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the work of Louis XI may be, the long contest between Louis and Charles the Bold is an almost uninterrupted series of intrigues, treacheries and sordid bargainings. Moreover, Commynes is not in the least a romantic writer; he is realistic and practical. To take this unpromising and, at times, tedious material and transmute it into a vivid, bustling romance which almost convinces us that it is true is an extraordinary feat of creative imagination which half justifies Tasso's proud boast that only God and poets deserve the name of creator. Scott is needlessly depreciated in these anti-Romantic days; needlessly, because he is not in the least mawkish or morbid. If anyone doubts the strength and health of Scott's creative imagination, let him read Commynes and "Quentin Durward"; the experience is a convincing object lesson.

The historian wants facts and carefully checks Commynes's statements by referring to registers, acts, deeds, proclamations, and the like; and he is quite right to do so. But ordinary people crave less for carefully wired historical skeletons than for the imaginative touch which clothes them in flesh and blood, gives them passions and aims, sets them moving and living to the mind's eye. What do the Acts of his reign tell us of Louis XI? A good deal, no doubt, if you have the historian's eye. Perhaps it is reprehensible to ask for a man and not for

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documents. Commynes, indeed, gives us a careful appreciation of Louis XI :

Et entre tous ceulx que j'ay jamais cogneu, le plus saige pour soy tyrer d'un mauvais pas en temps d'adversité, c'estoit le roy Loys unziesme, nostre maistre, et le plus humble en parolles et en habits, qui plus travailloit à gaigner ung homme qui le pouoit servir ou qui luy pouoit nuyre. . . .

Il estoit naturellement amy des gens de moyen estat et ennemy de tous grands qui se pouoient passer de luy. Nul homme ne presta jamais tant l'oreille aux gens ny ne s'enquist de tant de choses comme il faisoit ny ne voulut congnoistre tant de gens. . . .

There is small need to praise that famous portrait, it lives ; and yet so vivid is the Louis XI of Scott that we find ourselves thinking of him through the vaguer, if subtler, drawing of Commynes. Similarly, the use Scott has made of scenes from Commynes, such as the interview at Péronne, is so masterly that the images he evoked impress themselves more vividly on the mind even than the narrative of the original. Dramatic as is Commynes's account he weakens the interest of the story by intercalating a grave chapter of political wisdom ("Dangers des entrevues princières") which would be more acceptable after we have successfully got the King out of his awkward predicament. But enthusiasm for Scott must not make us unjust to Commynes. He is not the first in time nor the greatest of French memoir-writers, but luckily for us he was not a professional



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author ; for the professional authors of the fifteenth century can be mighty tedious when they show off their rhetorical graces. Commynes had that profound and untiring interest in affairs and personalities which is so essential to the memoir-writer ; his book is a loose collection of informal notes written for an Archbishop who meditated a history. How lucky it is that we surprise Commynes's thoughts in their undress, poured out helter-skelter, with no formal graces and little order, but fresh and vivid because his mind is so occupied with what it has to say that he gives no attention to how he is saying it. Is not this artless art the very pith and marrow of memoir-writing ? What would be impertinent negligence in other kinds of writing is here a virtue. Commynes was instinctively a vivid writer ; he gives us those touches of reality which more formal and polished writers despised. Who that remembers the dismal mud of war-time Flanders can fail to see a vivid picture of the soldiery in this sentence, which occurs in a description of the confused skirmishes round the suburbs of Liège :

Les boues y estoient grandes pour la continuelle pluye qu'il faisoit, et y estoient les hommes d'armes jusque par dessus les chevilles, et tout à pied.

Again, the reflections are both just and well put, even when commonplaces. Thus, Commynes de-

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scribes how Liège was surprised, because owing to their lack of discipline and the loss of their commanders in sallies, the good inhabitants of Liège had left their ramparts to eat their Sunday dinners. "En chascune maison trouvasmes la nappe mise," says Commynes, bringing the scene vividly before us, and adds: "C'est peu de chose que du peuple, s'il n'est conduyt par quelque chef qu'ilz ayent en reverence et en craincte, sauf qu'il est des heures et des temps que, en leur fureur, ilz sont bien à craindre."

It is also striking to observe from his cool narrative how hindered the Liégeois were by their democratic government in their contest with the Duke of Burgundy. The Duke decided and acted at once; the Liégeois called all the citizens together by sound of bell and lost much valuable time in vain deliberations. Indeed, a skilful Burgundian commander in a tight place, where he could not possibly have sustained a sally, kept the Liégeois amused all night by sending different and illusory proposals for a treaty which they solemnly debated while the Burgundians hurried up reinforcements.

The poems of Charles d'Orléans and the novel of "Jehan de Paris" both belong to the fifteenth century; the former to the period of the disastrous wars with England, the latter to the last years of the century during the reign of Charles VIII. Only the first volume of M. Champion's popular edition

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of Charles d'Orléans has yet been published; it contains the long and tedious "Retenue d'Amours," one of those somniferous allegories in which the Middle Ages delighted, "Ballades, Chansons, Complaintes, et Caroles." The Ballades, which are not the most interesting of the duke's poems, contain the collection by divers poets, including Villon, on the theme set by the duke: "Jè meurs de soif auprès de la fontaine." The cream of the collection is the eighty or ninety Chansons. They suffer indeed from their monotony, which comes from having nothing much to say and only a charming manner of saying it, but nearly every one of them has the grace and facility we associate with Charles d'Orléans. Side by side with famous little pieces like the "Dieu, qu'il la fait bon regarder" are many graceful trifles like this:

Le voulez vous  
Que vostre soye ?  
Rendu m'octroye,  
Pris ou recours.

Ung mot pour tous,  
Bas qu'on ne l'oye :  
Le voulez vous  
Que vostre soye ?

Maugré jalous  
Foy vous tendroye ;  
Or sa, ma joye,  
Accordons nous :  
Le voulez vous ?

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The easy skill with which that dainty trifle is turned is the reward of long practice and the result of an art which is consummate in its facile charm. It looks as if anyone could do it, but in fact there are few poets who can command the simplest words into such cunning music. These early French poets had a wonderful knack in turning a song. They seem as fresh and sweet as bird melodies and yet are built on the tradition of centuries, as doubtless the songs of birds are too. People talk of the songs and pretty diminutives of the *Pléïade* as if they had invented them. They were in existence centuries before. The delightful little pastoral play of "Robin and Marion," written by Adam le Bossu towards the end of the thirteenth century, containing some exquisite snatches of song. The dialect is rather ancient and crabbed, so it may be well to say, before quoting the following lines, that *baisselete* means a girl; *capelet*, a flower crown; *kief*, the head; *iert* means "will be"; *chainturete* means *petite ceinture*; *fremalet*, a brooch. The song is in dialogue form:

### ROBINS.

Bergeronnete,  
Douche baisselete,  
Donnés le moi, vostre capelet.  
Donnés le moi, vostre capelet.

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### MARIONS.

Robin, veus tu que je le mete  
Seur ten kief par amourete ?  
M'en iert il mieus se je l'i met ?  
M'en iert il mieus se je l'i met ?

### ROBINS.

Oïl, vous serés m'amiete,  
Vous averés me chainturete,  
M'aumosniere et men fremalet,  
Bergeronnete,  
Douche baisselete,  
Donnés le moi, vostre capelet.  
Donnés le moi, vostre capelet.

### MARIONS.

Volentiers, men dous amiet.

Is it not a shame that such delicate and still living song should be a sort of preserve for philologists, who crush its sweetness and bloom in heavy fingers ? Sung to the plaintive tones of some old stringed instrument like the *vielle*, on which the thirteenth-century minstrel Colin Muset played his (still happily preserved) melodic music with its queer melancholy rhythms, such songs must have been touching in the extreme. The melodies of Colin Muset, primitive and quaint as they are, haunt the memory for days. These old, forgotten poems have the same quality—a deep and indefinable pathos underlying apparent gaiety. The writers of these old French *chansons*



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and *pastourelles* were much greater poets than most of us realize. They are entirely the product of French medieval life; the only thing in our time which creates the same curious mood is the very simple, very primitive, but unspeakably touching music of some of the beggar musicians who visit the humblest Italian taverns.

“Jehan de Paris” plunges us into the sort of romance which still exists precariously in fairy-tales. There is very little plot, and most of the story is occupied with long descriptions of the wonderful possessions and wealth of Jehan de Paris. “Once upon a time”—*il fut jadis*—there was a King of France who saved the King and Queen of Spain from a great rebellion; and when the King of France was about to return to Paris with his army the Queen of Spain brought to him her infant daughter and begged that when she grew up he would choose a husband for her. And the King of France said she should marry his own son, Jehan; and incontinent he departed with his army, and the King and Queen of Spain made “grans pleurs et lamentations.” And after many years the King of France died and was embalmed and buried as befitted so great a prince and lord; and Monseigneur Jehan was crowned king. When the Princess of Spain grew up, her parents forgot their promise and affianced her to the King of England, who set out for Aragon by

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way of Paris, with the intention of buying rich gifts in France, since the poor kingdom of England afforded no such luxuries. Now, when King Jehan heard of this he bought up all the jewels and tapestries and rich kitchen stuffs of Paris (much to the annoyance of his brother of England), and disguised himself under the name of Messire Jehan de Paris, a wealthy burgess. And Jehan and his train rode towards Spain with the King of England, whom they did not fail to humiliate with their superior wit and wealth. And when they came to the royal city of Spain Jehan de Paris besought a lodging for a burgess of Paris and his servants, of whom there were ten thousand; and he sent into the city an hundred waggons, by twenty-fives, each guarded by two hundred soldiers. Then entered his heralds and his guards and his main guard and Messire Jehan with his barons; and the Kings of England, Spain, Portugal, and Navarre were mightily astounded at this wealth and pomp. But the Princess of Spain remarked that the hair of Jehan de Paris shone as bright as his gold collar. And after more display, Jehan revealed himself and recalled the promise of his father and wooed the Princess with bawdy jests which must not be repeated in this age but were then good manners. And so they were married, to the annoyance of the silly King of England; and there were more bawdy jests for the "noppes."

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Et au bout de neuf moys fit la royne ung beau fils, et au bout de cinq ans en fit ung aultre, lequel fut roy d'Espagne après le decèz de son grant pere, et le premier fut roy de France après son pere, que longuement vesquit, et qui tint son royaulme en bonne paix et union. Puis trespasserent de ce siècle pour aller en la gloire eternelle, ou je prie a Dieu qu'il nous doint grace que y puissions parvenir. Amen.

"Philippe de Commines : Mémoires." Edités par Joseph Calmette. Tome I. (Paris : Champion.)

"Charles d'Orléans : Poésies." Editées par Pierre Champion. Tome I. (Paris : Champion.)

"Le Roman de Jehan de Paris." Publié par Edith Wickersheimer. (Paris : Champion.)

"Adam le Bossu : Le Jeu de Robin et Marion." Edité par Ernest Langlois. (Paris : Champion.)

# V

## THE MIRACLE OF ST. NICHOLAS

**J**EAN BODEL'S "Li Jus de Saint Nicholai" is the oldest, or very nearly the oldest, of all the Miracle plays in the vernacular. (The Anglo-Norman "Jeu Adam," which is older, belongs to the Mystery plays.) It is now generally held that the Mysteries, or liturgical plays, were performed in the churches for edification, and permitted very little comic relief. The Miracles, on the other hand, came from the cathedral schools or monasteries, were played on the saint's holyday, and soon tended to the amusement rather than the edification of the spectators. Now the patron saint of schoolboys is Saint Nicholas (no other than the Santa Claus of these degenerate days), and naturally we find him the hero of the earliest Miracles. According to his enthusiast in Bodel's play, Saint Nicholas in the thirteenth century fulfilled the functions of Saint Anthony of Padua; for the whole play turns on the finding of a lost treasure. "Sains Nicolas," says the Preudhom, "returns all lost things, sets the wanderer on the right path,

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brings back miscreants, relights the blind and revives the drowned ; anything set under his guardianship will never be lost, even if it were a palace full of gold with no protection save his wooden image ! ” St. Nicholas (or Santa Claus) is therefore the protector of Exchequers and Treasury officials as well as of scholars, as Jean Bodel demonstrates in his play.

Jean Bodel lived at Arras at the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries, exercising the lucrative profession of a jongleur. He mentions the crusade of 1202 ; he wrote a *chanson de geste*, some *pastourelles*, and a very curious work which shows that he was probably a leper in his later years. He died about 1210. His dialect is the uncouth speech of thirteenth-century Arras, with a mixture of other dialects and a number of quite unintelligible slang words. Nevertheless, Bodel was a writer of powerful imagination, and he has galvanized into living figures and dramatic action the insipid tale of a tenth-century hagiographer of Calabria. He retains or reinvents the classical prologue, but in the conduct of his play, with its rapid changes of place and mingling of tragedy with gross comedy and naïve superstition, he is as romantic as anyone could desire.

“ Li Jus de Saint Nicholai ” contains 1,540 lines of verse, which change in measure and in rhyme-scheme according to dramatic and æsthetic necessity. Thus



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the comic scenes are nearly all in octosyllabic couplets, the fighting scenes are in alexandrines, and religious scenes are in strophes. There are twenty-two characters, thirty-two scenes, and at least eight different places or "mansiones." These are a royal palace, a temple of Tervagant, a tavern, four dwellings of emirs, and a ditch representing a gaol: all placed round an open space where battles and proclamations and the prologue happen. There are several proclamations in the early scenes, which may possibly have been a despairing poet's device to obtain a little silence from a noisy crowd anxious only for the comedy. And this comedy, which consists of a number of tavern scenes—drinking, dicing, quarrelling, cheating—is out of all proportion with the main action; it occupies over a third of the play, and was obviously prolonged to amuse the groundlings. Thus we really have a plot and a sub-plot; the first treating of the miracle of St. Nicholas, the second of the thieves in the tavern.

The story dramatized by Bodel runs as follows: A Christian army invades the territory of the Mohammedans, whose king sends out a messenger to mobilize his emirs and defeats the Christians, all of whom are slain with the exception of a *preudomme*, discovered praying before a wooden statue of St. Nicholas. The *paynims* carry the *preudomme* and his "wooden Mohammed" before the king, who

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affably calls him a son of a whore (*fil a putain*) and demands an explanation of the wooden Mohammed. The preudomme announces the great powers of St. Nicholas's protection (as quoted above), and the paynim king decides to test the truth of the matter; he will leave his treasury open and unguarded except by the statue, the preudomme shall be placed in custody, and the unguarded state of the royal treasury shall be proclaimed abroad. If the treasure is stolen, the preudomme shall die; if it is miraculously protected, he shall live. Of course the thieves at their tavern hear the news and rob the treasury successfully; they return to the tavern, gamble, drink, quarrel, and fall into a heavy sleep. Meanwhile, the king's seneschal has discovered the loss, the king laments deeply, and orders the preudomme to instant death; but at the prisoner's request grants a day's grace to give St. Nicholas a chance. An angel comforts the weeping preudomme; St. Nicholas appears to the sleeping thieves, wakes them, calls them *fil a putain*, and orders them to return the treasure and to replace his statue. The paynim rogues are so astounded that they swear *per signum sancte cruchefis*, and replace the treasure at once; the king is informed, is overjoyed, pardons the preudomme, becomes a Christian, renounces Mahom and Tervagant, and compels his emirs to do the same. One emir resists, and on force being applied he kneels and provides

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an excellent example of the futility of religious persecution. "Sains Nicolais," says this emir (the emir of "Orkenie," by the way), "Sains Nicolais, it is maugre myself that I adore you and by force; you have nothing of me but the shell; in word I am become your man, but my faith is in Mahom." The statue of Tervagant now breaks out into strange gibberish, interpreted by the king as a lamentation for the loss of his worshippers. The seneschal throws down the statue, and the play ends with a *Te Deum*.

Within the very narrow limits imposed upon him by his audience, his material, his rudimentary stage, his religion, Bodel has produced a play which is justly celebrated for the vigour of its characterization, its mingling of realism and fantastic imagination. Every character is clearly marked. The pagan king is less absurd than many a later Herod; the emirs are alternately grotesque and terrible; the Christian knights breathe the very spirit of chivalry and the crusade; the *preudomme* is a model of honest piety. The thieves, the gaoler, the tavern-keeper, the town crier, the tavern drawer, are all studied from the life in medieval Arras. The drunken scene in the tavern is so well done that no one now can follow what *does* happen with the dice or who has won—a masterly stroke. Tavern scenes were obviously the dramatic speciality of the people of Arras, for the thirteenth-century play, "*Courtois d'Arras*," is chiefly remark-

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able for its tavern characters ; a fact which has caused some scholars to attribute the play to Bodel, whereas in each case it is obviously a tribute to the favourite occupation of the inhabitants of the town. Rasoirs, Clikés, Pincédés, the thieves, are an epitome of the red-nosed *truands* of the Middle Ages. “Tproupt, tproupt ! Beuvons hardiement !” is their motto, and the profound sleep into which they sink after the robbery scarcely needed the miraculous interposition of St. Nicholas ; the miracle, indeed, as Bodel shows, was that the saint was able to wake them up. Along with all this realism we suddenly find a window opened on faery lands forlorn. What could be more romantic than the names of the four emirs : The Emir of Coine (Iconium), the Emir of Orkenie, the Emir of Olifferne, and, lastly, the Emir of the Land-Beyond-the-Dead-Tree, which, as everybody knows, is the first turning on the left just before you come to Prester John’s Land.

“Le Jeu de Saint Nicolas par Jean Bodel, Trouvère Artésien du XIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle.” Edité par Alfred Jeanroy. (Paris : Champion.)

VI

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A CENTURY ago the name of Villon was known to the literary public through a couplet of Boileau (who had probably never read a line of his work), praising him because he was able :

. . . Le premier dans ces siècles grossiers  
Débrouiller l'art confus de nos vieux romanciers.

There was a reprint of Marot's edition as late as 1742 ; the first modern edition was Prompsault's in 1832. Only within the last fifty years has it been possible to compose an authentic and critical biography of Villon, thanks to the labours of Longnon, Marcel Schwob, and M. Pierre Champion. At the present moment Villon is held unanimously to be the greatest French poet of the fifteenth century. The swing of the pendulum is complete. Indeed the danger is now that our "povre petit escollier" may be over-estimated. We find him ranked with Dante and Catullus ; described as "the first modern poet," "the greatest poet of the Middle Ages," "the greatest

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poet of the fifteenth-century Europe." Such adulation disconcerts the most sincere admirer of Villon. We are tempted to rebel, to point out how small a portion of Villon's work is really perfect ; how much of it is obscure, trivial, awkward ; how limited and premature his genius.

Sometimes we cannot help feeling that there is something a little factitious and forced in this excessive admiration ; Villon, like Donne and Baudelaire, is the kind of poet who is liable to become the victim of coteries. The enthusiasm of Schwob, of M. Champion, and M. Thuasne is a different matter. They are our masters in the study of Villon ; if we really wish to understand the "Lais" and the "Testament," we must sit at their feet ; and to carry the task through we need all their enthusiasm. Villon is really a most difficult poet ; the keenest *flair*, the quickest appreciation of poetry will only enable us to skim the surface, to "feel" a few of the ballades and stanzas. But, even so, we are liable to grotesque misconceptions ; and, without expert guidance, we cannot possibly expect to comprehend the "Lais" and the "Testament" as a whole. Without such guidance we may receive a very pleasant "henid" of Villon's work, but we cannot know it.

The language difficulty is perhaps the least troublesome, though that is formidable enough.

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M. Thuasne's interesting commentary occupies two volumes of small type, and a considerable portion is devoted to explanations of language difficulties. A great medieval scholar like Gaston Paris confessed several times that he was baffled by a couplet, a line, a phrase; and an expert like M. Thuasne says there is not a *savant* in the world who completely understands the ballades in *jargon*, and he is gently ironic at the expense of those who claim to know all about Villon. If the greatest experts in France admit their ignorance, how careful we English amateurs should be before laying down the law, and attempting a critical estimate of Villon! This caution is not pedantry; for how can we justly appreciate a poem we only partly comprehend or interpret erroneously? But there are other difficulties. Villon is one of the most personal and allusive of poets. He himself is the whole substance of his work; "Le Testament" is one long soliloquy, where he passes in review his life, his misfortunes, his sufferings, his degradation, his loves, his hatreds, even his crimes. To follow the thread of his meditation we must know his life "by heart," and even then something will elude us, because we have only an incomplete biography. Moreover, Villon wrote for a very small circle of *clercs*, and he constantly uses topical and local allusions, familiar enough to a fifteenth-century student at Paris, incomprehensible

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to us without a huge commentary. And then, again, he "ris en pleurs," he is ironic and paradoxical, jokes with tears in his eyes, is apparently solemn and even pathetic when he means to be satirical and amusing.

These facts, which could easily be supported by examples from Villon's poetry, fully justify (if any justification be needed) this large new edition of Villon, with its biography, critical "apparatus," and most interesting commentary; indeed, the commentary is not only a remarkable piece of scholarship, but is a kind of compendium of medieval French literature. The necessity for so elaborate and bulky a commentary is itself a criticism of Villon—if seven hundred pages of explanation are needed for less than three thousand lines of verse, might it not be argued that Villon is a specialist's poet, not the world's poet as Shakespeare and Horace and even Ronsard are? But then, how few people really *know* Shakespeare and Horace and Ronsard. How few of us can feel that we understand Milton as even Macaulay understood him. Villon is not one of those charming pocket-poets like Herrick and Horace, who are equally good company on a country walk, on a railway journey, or by the fireside—who wants a commentary on "Gather ye Rosebuds"? We must use the pick-axe to conquer these craggy lines of Villon, but then they are worth the labour. No

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doubt the "mere" lover of poetry will quail at attacking—how many scores of thousands of lines is it?—the "Roman de la Rose," or even the baffling ascent of Dante's "Paradiso"; but Villon is worth the trouble we must give to understand him. He is unique; he encourages us from the first with a few things like the "Ballade of the Ladies of Old Time" and the "Ballade des Pendus," which anyone can understand; and there is not too much of him. Sometimes, no doubt, the reward is scarcely worth the pains. Take, for example, these four lines:

Item, laisse *le Mortier d'Or*  
A Jehan, l'espicier, de la Garde,  
Et une potence Saint Mor,  
Pour faire ung broyer a moustarde.

Unless one has the genius of the born critic, those lines at first appear perfectly meaningless. Then we learn that "*le Mortier d'Or*" was a common sign over grocers' shops; that Jehan de la Garde was a rich gouty grocer of Paris against whom Villon had a grudge (possibly because the grocer would not lend him money); that a "*potence Saint Mor*" means a "crutch used by the gouty"; and that "*broyer a moustarde*" has three meanings, "to grind mustard," "to be hypochondriacal" and—an obscene *sous-entente*. The whole thing falls rather flat, and is hardly worth the trouble of working out; possibly

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one-fifth of Villon's work is on that level, or not much above it. The rest is poetry, and sometimes great poetry.

The general outline of Villon's life is fairly generally known. We all know that he was a poet, a lover and a poor scholar, a thief and a vagabond; that he was several times in prison, once under sentence of death; that his abrupt disappearance from contemporary records means that he either died of misery or was hanged. Stevenson's "A Lodging for the Night" is a very clever "arrangement" of Villon's character which errs perhaps by making him too much of a careless "Bohemian" and by ignoring the medieval Christian oscillating between "sin" (which covered any crime, however heinous) and the "repentance" which gave complete absolution. The intensely personal nature of Villon's work renders knowledge of his life essential.

He was born at Paris in 1431, during one of the most disastrous and miserable epochs of French history—the last stages of the Hundred Years War. He tells us himself that his parents were poor :

Povre je suis de ma jeunesse,  
De povre et de petite extrace;  
Mon pere n'ot oncq grant richesse. . . .

When he speaks of his mother she is always "ma povre mere," "la povre femme"; and in the *ballade*

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he makes for her "pour prier Nostre Dame" she describes herself as :

Femme je suis povrette et ancienne,  
Qui riens ne sçay ; oncques lettres ne lus.

His name was François de Montcorbier or François des Loges ; the name of Villon was derived from Guillaume de Villon, a "worthy chaplain" who adopted him, after the death of his father, between 1438 and 1440, when François was between seven and nine. This Guillaume de Villon treated his *protégé* with extraordinary kindness, even when he took to evil and criminal ways ; and, in his fashion, Villon was not ungrateful. In both the "Lais" and "Testament" his first legacy is for Maistre Guillaume ; in the one Villon leaves him "mon bruit" ("my fame"), and in the other "ma libraire" and the "Roman du Pet au Deable"—a lost work written when he was a student. In that touching, pathetic style Villon could use so effectively—not without a suspicion of blarney—he writes :

Item, et a mon plus que pere,  
Maistre Guillaume de Villon,  
Qui esté m'a plus doux que mere  
A enfant levé de maillon :  
Degeté m'a de maint bouillon. . . .

The meaning of the obscure last line is that he had helped François out of many a scrape. For at least

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until he was twenty-one, François was a credit to his protector. In 1449 he became Bachelor of Arts of the University of Paris, and Master of Arts on August 26, 1452. He was received at the house of Robert d'Estouteville, Provost of Paris, for whose wife, Ambroise de Loré, he wrote an acrostic ballade, "Au point du jour, que l'esprevier s'esbat," inserted in the "Testament." One must not be too impressed by Villon's title of Master of Arts; in the fifteenth century the words do not create the same instantaneous impression of culture and learning they do in the twentieth century. Villon's learning was probably enough to secure him his degree, and no more. The book he knew best was the "Roman de la Rose." His classical learning was that singular and sometimes charming deformation of antiquity, created out of legend and misread history by the Middle Ages. There is one delightful example of this learning in the Ballade of the Ladies. Probably many readers have been puzzled by that *Archipiada* who was "cousine germaine" to Thais. Villon probably found them in Renaut de Louhans's very free translation of the "De Consolatione Philosophiæ" of Boëthius; and *Archipiada*, it appears, is Alcibiades, who by some curious medieval whimsy was transformed into a woman "de gentil et plaisant corsage," much frequented by the disciples of "Aristotes."

Unfortunately for him, Villon was acquiring other

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knowledge more dangerous and practical than these fine classical flourishes. He fell into bad company—two of his closest student friends were subsequently hanged—and, which is almost worse for a poor man, into the company of the rich, the “*gracieux galans*”—

Si bien chantans, si bien parlans,  
Si plaisans en faiz et en dis.

Wine and women occupied much of his attention. He shows a remarkable familiarity with the Parisian taverns: the Pomme de Pin, la Mule, le Grant-Godet de Grève, and several others, where no doubt the “*repues franches*” of tradition took place. Villon appreciated good living; he dwells regretfully and enviously upon the idea of a cosy canonry:

Sur mol duvet assis, ung gras chanoine,  
Lez ung brazier, en chambre bien natee,  
A son costé gisant dame Sidoine,  
Blanche, tendre, polie et attintee. . . .

Lors je cogneus que, pour dueil appaisier,  
Il n'est tresor que de vivre a son aise.

He pictures to himself, in his cold and hungry garret, the good cheer of the “*grans maistres*” of this earth:

Bons vins ont, souvent embrochiez,  
Saulees, brouetz et gros poissons;  
Tartes, flaons, œfz fritz et pochiez. . . .

And, what with his unfortunate love-affairs, and those little affairs with other people's money-chests which

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were always coming to light at inopportune moments, and his present misery and cold, and regret for what might have been, poor Maistre Villon feels very low indeed :

Hé Dieu ! se j'eusse étudié  
Ou temps de ma jeunesse folle,  
Et a bonnes meurs dedié,  
J'eusse maison et couche molle.  
Mais quoy ? je fuyoie l'escolle,  
Comme fait le mauvais enfant. . .  
En escripvant ceste parolle,  
A peu que le cuer ne me fent.

But, even worse for Villon than bad company and excessive love of good living, was what Dr. Johnson described in himself as his "amorous propensities." Here, indeed, is one of the paradoxes of Villon's character ; how, we wonder, could the man who always remembered with a pang his hopeless passion for Catherine de Vauselles, who represents himself as the victim of love—how could he sink to the degradation of living as *souteneur* to La Grosse Margot ? Catherine de Vauselles cannot be identified with certainty, though a family of that name lived close to Saint-Benoît. What is certain is, that she rejected the poet's advances :

. . . Celle . . .  
Qui m'a si durement chassié,

And that she played fast and loose with him :

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Quoy que je luy voulsisse dire,  
Elle estoit preste d'escouter  
Sans m'acorder ne contredire ;  
Qui plus, me souffroit acouter  
Joignant d'elle pres m'accouter,  
Et ainsi m'aloit amusant,  
Et me souffroit tout raconter ;  
Mais ce n'estoit qu'en m'abusant.

Villon finally grew angry and—so we may suppose—satirized his mistress in one of those rather bawdy songs for which court pages were whipped. The same fate—whipping—befell our luckless poet, either as an official punishment or as a private vengeance of Mlle Catherine. Hear him confess :

De moy, povre, je veuil parler :  
J'en fus batu comme a ru telles,  
Tout nu, ja ne le quiers celer,  
Qui me feist maschier ces groselles,  
Fors Katherine de Vauselles ?

And yet, in spite of this irrevocable breach, Villon never forgot her ; the bitterness of his disappointed love is always finding expression in some passionate phrase, even in that half-buffooning epitaph where he says of himself : “ Qu'amours occist de son raillon.” Long before that he had sought consolation among light ladies, like Marion l'Ydolle and Jehanne de Bretagne, and all those “ jolies marchandes ” whose names he tells us. These light loves were at once the cause of his crimes, his misfortunes, and his

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poetry. It was in a brawl over a girl named Ysabeau that Villon killed a man (June 5, 1455), and was compelled to fly from Paris until his friends could obtain him the King's pardon. Who can doubt that the idleness he so laments was the result of their influence or that his desperate thefts had for their principal motive an imperious necessity to obtain money for the purchase of mercenary charms? It was the grim spectacle of an old prostitute, La Belle Héaulmière (who really existed), which set him off upon that tremendous and immortal meditation over the fragility of earthly beauty and pleasure. In the harshness of the poverty they brought upon him he learned those accents of bitter sincerity which render his poetry so superior to the flimsy cobwebs of "courteous" love-verse spun by his contemporaries. What is it that makes Villon a great poet? Primarily, this naked sincerity, this truth to reality. When he leaves mere railing and buffooning, and soars into stanza after stanza of immortal verse, the energy which gives him wings is the anguish of his own unhappy life, his cruel poverty, his torture (he suffered the "question by water") and dreary weeks of semi-starvation in a noisome dungeon, his unhappy loves, his bitter meditation upon life and death. He conceals nothing, except that he was a thief. In Villon's poetry there is no poetic convention, no false shame, and no feigned repentance or cringing for

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pity. He is simply a weak man who "sins" and suffers and cries out in pain; who repents and sins again, and is wounded deeper than ever. To us he appears strangely volatile and inconstant. At one time he is meditating upon the "neiges d'antan"; at another asking a loan from the Duc de Bourbon. When he is under sentence of death, he writes that poignant "Epitaphe Villon"—

Freres humains qui apres nous vivez,

which would wring indulgence and a momentary pang of commiseration from a hangman; and when he has finished it, luxuriated in the emotion, he writes this perky quatrain :

Je suis François, dont ce me poise,  
Né de Paris emprès Pontoise,  
Qui d'une corde d'une toise  
Sçaura mon col que mon cul poise.

This vagabond, this "Coquillard," or member of the fraternity of rogues and thieves, dead apparently to all generous and disinterested feelings, surprises us with a patriot's invective against all those—

Qui mal voudroit au royaume de France !

But the most extraordinary paradox of all is his varying reactions to women. We may remind ourselves of human inconsistency, that man is both

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beast and angel, that Villon himself was one of the most "ondoyant et divers" of characters; even so, it is hard to realize that such extremes of delicacy and coarseness could be touched by the same spirit. We read the *Ballade of the Ladies* and dwell upon lines like

Qui beaulté ot trop plus qu'umaine.

and

La royne Blanche comme lis.

There surely is a poet of delicate sensibility with a wonderful respect for, and devotion to, women. We turn the pages; here is Villon sending his Lady Catherine a ballade ending in "R"—which was a sort of metaphysical insult—choosing as the messenger to carry it Pernet de la Barre (whose occupation was a police inspector of prostitutes) and directing him:

. . . S'il rencontre en son erre  
Ma demoiselle au nez tortu,  
Il luy dira, sans plus enquerre,  
"Orde paillarde, dont viens tu?"

What more curious contrast than the "*Ballade-prayer to Our Lady*" made for his mother, and the revolting "*Ballade de la Grosse Margot*"?

Ordure amons, ordure nous assuit;

so he describes, without palliation, his life with this horrible Margot. What poet has so exquisitely

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expressed the physical beauty of women, or so cruelly described its lamentable wreck? Who, but the tenderest of lovers, could have written :

Corps féminin, qui tant es tendre,  
Poly, souef, si précieux.

And who, but the same lover, shocked into horror, or the most heartless of cynics could have written that terrible description of the old Héaulmière ?

Le front ridé, les cheveux gris,  
Les sourcilz cheus, les yeulx estains . . .  
Oreilles pendantes, moussues,  
Le vis pally, mort et destains,  
Menton froncé, levres peaussues. . . .

C'est d'umaine beaulté l'issue !  
Les bras cours et les mains contraites,  
Des espaules toute bossue ;  
Mamelles, quoy ? Toutes retraites ;  
Telles les hanches que les tettes ;  
Du sadinet, fy ! Quant des cuisses,  
Cuisses ne sont plus, mais cuissettes  
Grivelees comme saulcisses.

No doubt Villon had been in more than one scrape through his devotion "aux tavernes et aux filles" between his university days and 1455, but in June of that year he became guilty of manslaughter through killing a priest named Sermoise in a street brawl. The "letters of remission" granted to Villon by the King, bearing date January 1456, are in existence,

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and make most interesting reading. They are, unfortunately, far too long to quote. During these months of absence from Paris Villon must have wandered about the country in misery. It is possible that he was concerned in the theft of a considerable sum of money from a small town of Anjou in October 1455. Perhaps it was at this time he joined the "Coquillards" and learned their *jargon* and their thievish habits. At all events, he was back in Paris early in 1456, still in love with Catherine de Vauselles, but, as a pardoned criminal, with less hope than ever. He formed a plan of going to Angers, where he had an uncle in an abbey, and, before setting out on the journey, composed his "Lais," or "Petit Testament" as it is frequently called.

A little circumstance, which Villon omitted mentioning in his poem, delayed him for a day or two. One December night in 1456, a disreputable companion, Colin de Cayeux, proposed to Villon that they and others should rob the Collège de Navarre of a large sum of money. There was a dinner at the Taverne de la Mule, where the matter was discussed between Villon, Colin, Guy Tabarie, a Picardy monk Dom Nicholas, and one Petit Jehan, a clever picklock. The theft was successful, and after a dinner of celebration at the Pomme de Pin, Villon left Paris. Unluckily, Guy Tabarie, who had merely acted as watcher, while the others were breaking

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open the chest, confided the secret to a *curé*, who gave the name of the thieves to the police. Villon, of course, heard of this, and kept away from Paris. His wanderings about the country were a long Odyssey of miseries, relieved by a few brief periods of success at the courts of local potentates. Charles d'Orléans received him kindly, and gave him a pension; the ballade, "*Je meurs de soif auprès de la fontaine*," was written for a competition organized by the duke. But this ballade itself shows that Villon was already in disgrace with the duke and implores his forgiveness for some unknown offence.

We trace the poet at Bourges, at Saint-Satur-sous-Sancerre, at Moulins, where he met Jean II, Duc de Bourbon, and borrowed six crowns from him. A ballade "asking for more" was unsuccessful, and Villon "moved on" to Rousillon in a lamentable state of poverty and distress. In the middle of 1460 we find him in prison, and apparently for something serious, since he thought he was in danger of death. He was liberated through one of those curious customs of the Middle Ages; on July 17, 1460, the duke and duchess, and their three-year-old daughter entered Orléans, and all prisoners were set free. Villon expressed his gratitude for this lucky escape in the poem to Marie d'Orléans:

O louee conception  
Envoyee ça jus des cieulx, . . .

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What Villon did with his freedom is not known. Next summer (1461), he was in prison again, in Meun, by order of the Bishop of Orléans, Thibault d'Auxigny, who kept him in a dungeon on bread and water. Villon pours out his fury and indignation against the Bishop in the opening stanzas of the "Testament." He would probably have remained in this episcopal dungeon for the rest of his life, had he not been released owing to the opportune visit of Louis XI to Meun in October 1461.

This is the origin of Villon's extravagant and loyal praise of that artful monarch to whom, in the fullness of his heart, the grateful poet wished the frightful encumbrance of "twelve male children," all "born in lawful wedlock."

At the beginning of 1461, or beginning of 1462, Villon was hidden in one of the suburbs of Paris, where he wrote the "Testament," inserting in appropriate places several of his earlier poems. In November 1462 he was imprisoned in the Châtelet on the old charge of theft. He came to an arrangement with the Collège de Navarre, agreeing to pay six score gold crowns (supplied or guaranteed, no doubt, by the good Guillaume de Villon) and was released about the 7th of November. A year later he was concerned, merely as a spectator, in a street brawl, and was at once arrested. Medieval justice, which had so often pardoned the poet for real crimes,

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now condemned him to death for no crime at all. Villon wrote his magnificent "Ballade des Pendus," and appealed against his sentence, which was commuted to ten years' banishment. The ballades "Question au clerc de Guichet" and "Louenge a la Court" must have been written on or about January 3, 1463, when the sentence of death was withdrawn.

And this is the last we hear of Maistre François Villon.

Repos eternal donne a cil,  
Sire, et clarté perpetuelle,  
Qui vaillant plus ni escuelle  
N'ot oncques, n'ung brin de pereil.  
Il fut rez, chief, barbe et sourcil,  
Comme ung navet qu'on ret ou pelle,  
Repos eternal donne a cil.

"François Villon. Œuvres." Edition critique avec notice et glossaier, par Louis Thuasne. (Paris: Picard. 3 vols.)

"Histoire Poétique de Quinzième Siècle." Par Pierre Champion. (Paris: Champion. 2 vols.)



## VII

### THE LYONS POETS

IN the early sixteenth century the town of Lyon was not only commercially important, as it is still, but a centre of culture and for a time a centre of poetic creation. Its position as a trading community attracted not only the superior wealth and luxury of Italy, but travellers to and from that once noble home of the arts and civilization. These visitors, the Italian colony, the cultivated society of the town itself made possible the publication of the ancient and modern classics of Italy, in the original and in translations. Lyon could boast of possessing men of learning like Bunyon and Aneau; Latin poets such as Bourbon and Visagier; but, above all, several poets in the vulgar tongue, true precursors of the Pléiade, authentic if slender talents that have left traces in French literature. These are Maurice Scève and his two charming friends, Pernette du Guillet and Louise Labé. Their names are to be found in many an anthology and literary history; their works, especially Louise Labé's, are not infrequently reprinted and sometimes read.

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Maurice Scève was born at Lyon somewhere about the year 1510. He distinguished himself in 1533 by discovering what was believed to be the tomb of Petrarca's Laura, which François I desired to see. The tomb found by Scève contained a leaden box, inside which were an Italian sonnet on parchment and the bronze medal of a woman bearing the inscription M.L.M.I., interpreted by Scève as Madonna Laura Morta Jace. We now know that this was not the grave of the "white and cold lady" Petrarca worshipped—

Giovene donna sotto un verde lauro  
Vidi, più bianca e più fredda che neve  
Non percossa dal sol molti e molt' anni—

but at all events Scève became notorious as the discoverer of the genuine tomb. Naturally, Scève imitated Petrarca and other Italian poets; in 1536 he published his "Arion," in 1544 his "Délie," a collection of Platonic love poems addressed to his fair disciple, Pernette du Guillet, who died the next year in the flower of her age. Scève retired into solitude after this blow, and two years later (1547) he published "Saulsaye, Eglogue de la Vie Solitaire." In 1562 he published a philosophical poem—now extremely scarce—called "Microcosme." After that his fate is unknown, but the silence of the Catholic poets is attributed by modern critics to the fact that Scève became a Protestant.

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Maurice Scève is a poet who may be recommended to admirers of the "new metaphysical" or "difficult" school of poets. Like them, Scève is learned and obscure, so "anxious to show his subtlety that nothing simple pleased him," hiding his thought from the vulgar, above all "avoiding the reproach of ignorance and simplicity." M. Aynard boldly pronounces the names of Mallarmé and M. Paul Valéry in association with Scève, and then, by implication, condemns all three as *rhétoriciens*. Scève's long philosophical poem has not been reprinted since the sixteenth century and exists in one or two copies only. From the description given by M. Aynard this poem seems to be well worth reprinting. It is in three books of 1,000 lines each, and deals with the creation of man and the development of knowledge; it precedes Du Bartas and contains passages which seem a distant, faint foreshadowing of "Paradise Lost." For instance, this description of Eve:

Ses yeux estincellans non de flamme lascive  
Rioient pudiquement la naïveté vive  
La bonté, et douceur de sa simplicité  
Se hontoyant modeste en humble gravité  
Qui la fait de costé à demy l'œil ouvrir  
Ne l'osant plus a plein dessus luy descouvrir  
Ou peu à peu plus seure elle regarde et voit  
Mais sans connaître encore ce qu'elle appercevoit.

The large collection of *dizains* known as "Délie" contains lines of great beauty which are astonishing

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in the pages of this primitive. M. Aynard not unnaturally thinks of Mallarmé when he finds lines like this :

Ma face, angoisse à quiconques la voit . . .

and

L'oisiveté des délicates plumes . . .

and

Leuth resonnant, et le doux son des cordes . . .

Baudelaire is suggested by one magnificent couplet :

Tu me seras Myrrhe incorruptible  
Contre les vers de ma mortalité.

The attentive reader will find many remarkable beauties in these *dizains*, from a phrase like "l'Hyver tremblant en son séjour," and a sensitive exclamation like this :

L'Esprit vouloit, mais la bouche ne peut  
Prendre congé . . .

to a rounded thought like this :

Rien, ou bien peu, faudroit pour me dissoudre  
D'avec son vif ce caducque mortel :  
A quoy l'Esprit se veut très bien resouldre,  
Jà prevoyant son corps par la Mort tel,  
Q'avecques lui se fera immortel,  
Et qu'il ne peut que pour un temps périr.

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Doncques, pour paix à ma guerre acquérir,  
Craindray renaistre à vie plus commode ?  
Quand sur la nuict le jour vient à mourir.  
Le soir d'icy est Aulbe à l'Antipode.

The curious eclogue "Saulsaye" is supposed to have been written in the solitude to which Scève retired after the death of Pernette du Guillet, his *parfaite amie*. This long verse dialogue is far superior both in thought and versification to the average eclogue of the Renaissance. The poem contains lines expressive of poignant grief, of natural beauty, and of an ardent yearning for solitude. There is something refined and delicate in passages of this sort :

. . . m'esgaye

A regarder par admiration  
La couleur vive, et variation  
De mainte fleur naïve et proprelette.  
Et les voyant si fort je me delecte,  
Que mon plein sein une à une en amasse  
Puis jè choisís quelque umbrageuse place  
Près du rivage . . .  
Lors je respans mes fleurs dessous ma teste,  
En attendant qu'à dormir me convie  
Le son de l'eau murmurant, comme pluye,  
Qui lentement sur les arbres descend :  
Ou comme autour de ces estanz on sent  
Le vent souef parmy les cannes bruire.

At least in the seventy pages of selections now published an intelligent reader will find very little "obscurity" in Scève and considerable beauty

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intellect and strength. The charge of obscurity is one of the most fatal to a poet's reputation, and Scève would seem to have suffered unjustly. It might be a deserved revenge for Scève after some centuries of disparagement if his works were made the subject of a study by one of the more intelligent among our younger poets. Mr. Herbert Read or Mr. Conrad Aiken would certainly find Scève interesting.

Pernette du Guillet and Louise Labé were both friends and disciples of Scève, who had a deep feeling of pure affection for Pernette and mourned her death sincerely. Pernette's writing is not of much importance, though she wrote some charming songs. She is remembered rather as a graceful and charming personality, one of the first Frenchwomen under princely rank to adopt the Italian ideals of feminine culture and influence. She was expert in music, with the lute, the spinet, and "other musical instruments," an accomplishment often referred to in Scève's "Délie"; moreover, she knew Italian and Spanish, had a fair knowledge of Latin, and was about to begin the study of Greek when her life was suddenly cut short, in 1545. We know very little about her, but we may think of her as a predecessor of that long line of distinguished Frenchwomen who have cultivated the arts without losing any of their charm as women. Her poems preceded those of the more

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famous Louise Labé by ten years. One of the best among them is this restrained and delicate chanson :

Qui dira ma robe fourree  
De la belle pluye doree,  
Qui Daphnes enclose esbranla :  
Je ne sçay rien moins que cela.

Qui dira qu'à plusieurs je tens  
Pour en avoir mon passetemps,  
Prenant mon plaisir çà et là :  
Je ne sçay rien moins que cela.

Qui dira que j'ay revelé  
Le feu longtemps en moy celé  
Pour en toy veoir si force il a :  
Je ne sçay rien moins que cela.

Qui dira, que d'ardeur commune  
Qui les jeunes gentz importune  
De toy je veulx et puis holà :  
Je ne sçay rien moins que cela.

Mais qui dira que la Vertu  
Dont tu es richement vestu  
En ton amour m'estincella  
Je ne sçay rien mieulx que cela.

Mais qui dira que d'amour sainte  
Chastement au cueur suis attaincte  
Qui mon honneur onc ne foula  
Je ne sçay rien mieulx que cela.

The sonnets of Louise Labé have secured her a place in most anthologies of French poetry, but it is

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doubtful whether many readers push their interest so far as to read one of the reprints of the slight volume of her "Œuvres," published in 1555. She was the daughter of a bourgeois of Lyon and was born between 1515 and 1524, probably about 1520. She married a rich tradesman and, from her husband's trade, was known as La Belle Cordière. She was quite as accomplished as Pernette, for she embroidered and played the lute admirably; she knew Latin, Spanish and Italian. Jealousy, contemporary and later, has had its fling at her personal reputation: but modern commentators are all in favour of her virtue. Calvin ungallantly called her *plebeia meretrix*, but who would accept Calvin's or John Knox's opinion of a woman? At all events the beauty, talents, and perhaps the love affairs of Louise Labé were sufficiently known to be depreciated by those who could not pretend to her friendship. She became a widow between 1559 and 1562 and retired to a house in the country. She died in 1566.

As a writer Louise Labé is distinguished by the sincerity of her emotions and the clarity of her style, both in prose and verse. These qualities have given her a place in literature far above her learned and recondite friend, Scève. The prose dialogues of the "Débat de Folie et d'Amour" are highly esteemed, and one or two of her sonnets may justly be called famous. The sonnets:

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Tout aussi tot que je commence à prendre . . .

and

Oh si j'estois en ce beau sein ravie . . .

and

Tant que mes yeus pourront larmes espandre . . .

have a small but immortal place in French poetry. No Frenchwoman before Louise Labé had expressed passion with such a fine ring of sincerity and with such genuine poetic talent. The neatest sonnet is probably the "Tout aussi tot," which is the best known of all Louise Labé's work ; but her highest flight in poetic thought and passion was expressed in her fourteenth sonnet :

Tant que mes yeus pourront larmes espandre,  
A l'heur passé avec toy regretter :  
Et qu'aus sanglots et soupirs resister  
Pourra ma voix, et un peu faire entendre :  
Tant que ma main pourra les cordes tendre  
Du mignart Lut, pour tes graces chanter :  
Tant que l'esprit se voudra contenter  
De ne vouloir rien fois que toy comprendre :  
Je ne souhaite encore point mourir.  
Mais quand mes yeus je sentiray tarir,  
Ma voix cassee, et ma main impuissante,  
Et mon esprit en ce mortel sejour  
Ne pouvant plus montrer signe d'amante :  
Priray la Mort noircir mon plus cler jour.

"Les Poètes Lyonnais, Précurseurs de la Pléiade. Maurice Scève, Louise Labé, Pernette du Guillet." Introduction de Joseph Aynard. (Paris : Bossard.)

## VIII

### JACQUES GRÉVIN

**W**HEN the existence of Shakespeare was timidly revealed to eighteenth-century France, a critical abbé wrote a patriotic pamphlet in which he pointed out that France possessed an early dramatic poet, equal or superior to "ce Shaksper." The writer thus exhumed for this overwhelming comparison was Jacques Grévin. Striking as the similarity was in the eighteenth century, it appears to the modern inquirer to be restricted to the fact that each wrote a play about Julius Cæsar, taking the plot from Plutarch. If we add to this that Grévin's tragedy, contrary to the usage of French classic drama, contains (like Shakespeare's) no "love interest," that both wrote a sonnet sequence, and both lived in the sixteenth century, we shall perceive what a great critic the abbé was and how much the two poets are alike. There is even one other curious point of resemblance: both were at some time of their lives in the presence of Queen Elizabeth.

It is not Grévin's fault if such extravagant claims

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were made on his behalf, and it is hardly necessary to say that the selection of his work made accessible to the public in the "Classiques Garnier" series is not intended as a raid on Shakespeare's laurels. Indeed, the modern editor points out that the resemblances of his tragedy to "Julius Cæsar" are accidental and unimportant, but asserts that Voltaire pillaged Grévin for his "Mort de César." In both these remarks there is room for qualification; the resemblance between Grévin and Shakespeare is probably not accidental but due to their common source, Plutarch; and since Voltaire wrote "Le Mort de César" in England, he was far more likely to adapt the same plot to French taste from Shakespeare than to imitate a "barbaric" French dramatist of the early sixteenth century. However this may be, Grévin is a not unimportant person in the early history of French Renaissance tragedy. Jodelle's "Cléopâtre" (1552) preceded Grévin's "César" (1561), but "César" is an immense improvement on Jodelle's play and may fairly claim to be the first French tragedy of any importance; it is the French "Ferrex and Porrex," which, strangely enough, was produced before Queen Elizabeth in 1561, during Grévin's brief visit to England and a few weeks before "César" was played in Paris.

Grévin was born of parents of modest means in 1538, at Clermont-en-Beauvaisis. About 1550 he

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was sent to school in Paris, where one of his masters was the great humanist Muret, and one of his fellow-pupils Etienne Jodelle, afterwards one of the Pléiade. At this Collège de Boncourt, in 1552, Jodelle's "Cléopâtre" was played, and the spectacle of that day's triumph and enthusiasm is held to have determined Grévin's vocation for poetry. Grévin became one of Ronsard's favourite disciples. In 1556 he was received master of arts and began to study medicine, such functions not being then inconsistent with the writing and study of poetry. In 1560 he proceeded bachelor of medicine; and during the four years which elapsed after taking his arts degree he produced several occasional pieces (which included a "hymn" on the marriage of the Dauphin to Mary Stuart), a comedy in the old French manner called "La Trésorière," and a "Pastorale" for the marriage of Marguerite of France to the Duke of Savoy. In 1560 Robert Estienne, the great Renaissance printer, produced a volume of Grévin's poems, containing an amorous sonnet-sequence called "L'Olimpe"—written to a girl whose real name was the commonplace one Nicole—and some satirical sonnets with the Ronsardian title "Gélodacrye." The book opened with commendatory sonnets from Ronsard, Joachim du Bellay and Rémy Belleau. But Grévin was a Calvinist; and this not only estranged him from the Catholic Pléiade when the religious wars broke



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out in France, but forced him to take refuge in England at the end of 1560, probably because he had "had a main finger" in a violent denunciation of the Cardinal de Lorraine. The French poet was only a short time in England but was presented to Queen Elizabeth and wrote a flattering poem to her, "Le Chant du Cigne," which has never been published though the manuscript is preserved in the Bibliothèque National. He was back in Paris before February 16, 1561 (new style), when his "César" and a new comedy, "Les Esbahis," were performed at the Collège de Beauvais. In the same year he passed his final examination as a doctor and published a collected edition of his plays. Thus, at twenty-three he had almost completed his poetic career; for, though he wrote other short poems, most of his later books are medical or translations, including two collections of "Emblems," a work on enchantment and sorcery, a pamphlet which succeeded in securing the official condemnation of antimony as a medicine, and a children's book which is usually attributed to Plantin, the printer.

Grévin married, but not the lady of his sonnets; it is not known when or whom he married. In 1567 he again fled to England on account of the religious wars; from a sonnet we learned that he "took oars" on the Thames, frequented bear-baitings, and visited "les monuments," especially the Palace of Bridewell.

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He then went to Antwerp and worked for the Plantin press; one of the four books he produced there was a treatise on poisons, dedicated to Queen Elizabeth. From Antwerp Grévin proceeded to Savoy, where he entered the service of the duchess, who employed him as her doctor and made him a *conseiller d'état*; he was even sent on diplomatic missions, but all we know of them is that they took him to Rome, about which he wrote twenty-four sonnets, also unpublished. M. Pinvert says these sonnets are "très belles," and recall the "Antiquités" of du Bellay; they are very Calvinist in tone. On November 5, 1570, Grévin died, aged only thirty-two.

Grévin's "César" is the most important thing he wrote, but his other work is not altogether negligible. His comedies are likely to defeat any but an enthusiast; French drama contains so many good comedies that moderately successful work of this primitive kind is insufficiently uncommon to hold the attention. As a follower of the Pléiade, Grévin creates more interest with his lyric poetry. One rather regrets that the editor concentrated on the two sonnet sequences instead of giving a selection from all his lyrical pieces; for even the humblest disciple of the Pléiade may catch some of the charm of their quick measures and tinkling rhymes and diminutives. The "Olimpe" series is not remarkable for swiftness of imagination, depth of thought or verbal richness

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and felicity; but it is comparatively free from affectation and is more "correct" than one would expect a pre-Malherbe poet to be. It looks as if sonneteering came too easily to Grévin; he is too diffuse—a common fault with French poets of his age—and too soon satisfied with poetic common-places. There is more energy in the "Gélodacrye" sonnets; one especially, which runs on the theme "All the world's a stage," is worth quoting, though Grévin has not improved the thought which he borrowed from Montaigne :

Qu'est-ce de ceste vie ? Un public eschafault,  
Où celuy qui sçait mieux jouer son personnage,  
Selon ses passions eschangeant le visage,  
Est tousjours bien venu et rien ne luy défaut.

Encor' qui se peult bien déguiser comme il fault,  
Prest à servir un Roy représentant un page,  
Ou luy donner conseil s'il faut faire le sage,  
Celuy, de jour en jour, s'avancera plus hault.

Ainsi souventes fois l'on voit sur un théâtre  
Un conte, un duc, un roy à mille jeux s'esbatre,  
Et puis en un instant un savetier nouveau ;

Et cil qui maintenant banni de sa province  
N'estoit seur de soymesme, or gouverner un Prince,  
Après avoir passé derrière le rideau.

The tragedy of "César" was derived, as to plot, from Plutarch and, as to style and construction, from Seneca and Muret; the action is encumbered by a lyrical chorus of Roman soldiers. The first act

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shows only a dialogue between Cæsar and Antony, in which Cæsar complains of rebellious tendencies at Rome in a speech so long that it more than stands in lieu of prologue ; yet even here there are ringing verses far superior to any dramatic poetry of the time, heroic accents which vaguely herald the noble declamations of Corneille :

Mais n'est-ce pas assez vécu pour de ma gloire  
Ensuivre heureusement une longue mémoire ?  
Mais n'est-ce pas assez qu'avoir par mes vertus  
Rangé dessous mes lois les vainqueurs des vaincus ?  
N'est-ce donc pas assez d'être craint de ceux même  
Devant qui de frayeur tout le monde vient blême ?  
Ce m'est assez de voir la Romaine hauteur  
Ores être bornée avecque ma grandeur.

Cæsar expresses fears for his life ; Antony recommends repressive measures, but Cæsar inclines to indulgence. The chorus comments in the vein of Seneca. Act II introduces Decimus and Marcus Brutus and Cassius. Marcus Brutus opens with another tremendous oration, which includes those fine lines :

Et quand on parlera de César et de Rome,  
Qu'on se souvienne aussi qu'il a été un homme,  
Un Brute, le vengeur de toute cruauté,  
Qui aura d'un seul coup gagné la liberté.  
Quand on dira : César fut maître de l'empire,  
Qu'on dise quant-et-quant : Brute le scut occire ;  
Quand on dira : César fut premier Empereur,  
Qu'on dise quant-et-quant : Brute en fut le vengeur.

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All three of these personages being convinced at the opening of the scene that Cæsar must be murdered, there remains nothing for them to do but lash themselves into a fury and exhort each other to the deed; and this they proceed to do, with "horrid implications" on the name and person of Cæsar. Cassius brings the scene to a close by calling in turn upon each of the seven hills by name and the triumphal arches in general to witness that "*vous verrez aujourd'hui renaître liberté.*" The third act gives us Calpurnia's dream in a dialogue between her and a "nurse," who asserts that dreams are unreliable; Cæsar comes in with Decimus Brutus and is at first tempted to put faith in the dream and refrain from attending the Senate. Decimus Brutus acts the same part here as in Shakespeare's tragedy, taunts Cæsar with cowardice and so provokes him to his fate. Act IV, a short one, contains the recital of Cæsar's death by a Messenger to Calpurnia and the Nurse. In the last act we have the speeches of Marcus Brutus and Antony and the uprising of the soldiers to destroy the conspirators. The speech of Antony is remarkable, and raises a query whether after all Shakespeare had not seen Grévin's play. Plutarch says nothing of Antony's speech in the life of Cæsar; but the description of the "funeral oration" in the life of Antony may have suggested it independently to both dramatists. The contrast is piquant:

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M. ANTOINE :

Et vous, braves soldats, voyez, voyez, quel tort  
On vous a fait, voyez cette robe sanglante,  
C'est celle de César qu'ores je vous présente :  
C'est celle de César magnanime Empereur,  
Vrai guerrier entre tous, César qui d'un grand cœur  
S'acquit avec vous l'entière jouissance  
Du monde ; maintenant a perdu puissance,  
Et gist mort étendu, massacré pauvrement  
Par l'homicide Brute.

LE PREMIER SOLDAT :

Armons nous sur ce traître,  
Armes ! Armes ! soldats, mourrons pour notre maître.

To compare Grévin with Shakespearc is, of course, absurd ; though for the Frenchman's sake one would like to think that Shakespeare had done him the honour of borrowing from him. The true comparison is with "Ferrex and Porrex."

MAR :

Alas, he liveth not ! it is too true  
That with these eyes, of him a peerless prince  
Son to a King, and in the flower of youth,  
Even with a twink a senseless stock I saw.

AROS :

O damned deed !

Compared with that Grévin's "César" is not so contemptible.

"Théâtre Complet et Poésies choisies de Jacques Grévin."  
Notices et notes par Lucien Pinvert. (Paris : Garnier.)



## IX

### ROBERT GARNIER

**G**ARNIER is an interesting figure in sixteenth-century French literature. He was not a regular member of La Pléiade, but was in close touch with them and received their official approval; as he was a Catholic, they did not all change their minds about him as they did with his dramatic predecessor, Grévin. Many of his plays are preceded by lavish praise from Ronsard, Rémy Belleau, Baïf, and others; one faithful and learned friend greeted each play with a Latin commendatory poem, and even soared into Greek on appropriate occasions. Garnier's plays were not meant for the stage, and there is little evidence to prove more than a few scattered performances, but their popularity with the reading public is apparent from the fact that over forty editions were printed in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. After the appearance of Corneille, the plays of Garnier rapidly fell out of fashion and were despised by eighteenth-century critics—both Voltaire and La Harpe were very

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severe ; but in the last half-century numerous studies of Garnier have appeared, and his plays have been more than once reprinted. With the possible exception of Alexandre Hardy, he is the most important French writer of tragedy before Corneille, and his influence on French classical tragedy was considerable. He differs completely from Hardy in that Hardy was a poor professional writing only for the stage, while Garnier was a well-off amateur writing at his leisure with little thought of stage production.

Guillaume Colletet's manuscript "Lives of the French Poets" was unfortunately lost in 1871 in the burning of the Bibliothèque du Louvre, and information about Garnier's life is limited. He was born in 1544 at La Ferté-Bernard, in Maine, and studied law at Toulouse ; in the Jeux Floraux of 1563 he gained one of the minor prizes, "La Violette," defeating Du Bartas. When Charles IX came to Toulouse in 1565, Garnier was posted at the cross-roads to read him two eclogues and three sonnets ; luckily for the King, it was so cold that they had to be delivered in manuscript. His first book, "Plaintes Amoureuses," is lost ; the lady celebrated was given the pseudonym of "Agnette" by the poet, but no one knows who she really was. In 1567 we find him an "avocat au Parlement" at Paris and publishing a long "Hymne de la Monarchie" ; next year the great printer, Robert Estienne, issued Garnier's first tragedy,

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"Porcie." On May 12, 1569, he was installed "conseiller au présidial de Mans," and five years later he was promoted to the important post of "lieutenant criminel," which meant that he was the chief magistrate in the province of Maine. In 1586 he was further promoted to the position of "membre du Grand Conseil," the functions of which often took him to Paris, though he appears to have resided chiefly at Mans. Meanwhile, he had married in 1573 a lady named Françoise Hubert, who bore him several children and shared his literary tastes. Her poetic talents and conjugal admiration for her husband may be judged from this quatrain prefixed to the tragedy of "Cornélie":

Garnier ne mourra point tandis que sa Porcie  
Vivra dedans ses vers, vivra sa Cornélie  
Avec son Hippolyt; car la Mort, bien qu'il meure,  
Ne sçauroit que son œuvre éternel ne demeure.

In the company of this sympathetic wife, Garnier passed many years at Mans, composing his tragedies during the ample leisure hours of a Judge. After the publication of "Les Juifves" in 1583, Garnier ceased to write plays, though his reputation continued to grow and he apparently retained his interest in literature, if we may take literally the words of an old writer who says of Garnier, "Il ne laissa couler pas un seul moment de sa vie qu'il n'estudiast pour

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son utilité particulière." His last years seem to have been unhappy. In 1585 he lost the friendship of Ronsard ; in 1588 his wife died and he was afflicted by unspecified "disgrâces publiques"; moreover, the calamities of the civil war attained their height, Mans was taken by the troops of the Ligue in 1589 and retaken by Henri IV in the same year. Garnier fell ill, and died on September 30, 1590, and was buried in the church of the Cordeliers at Mans beside his wife. A stained-glass window erected to their memory has disappeared ; in 1791 their marble busts were removed and now decorate the funeral vault of the Luarts ; at the same epoch the remains of the poet and his wife were reinterred in the local cemetery—the fury of the Revolution did not spare even the dead. No "tears of the Muses" accompanied the poet's hearse in those distracted days ; and it was not until 1601 that Vauquelin de la Fresnaye published an Epitaphe on Garnier in which we are informed that

Il fut des vers grégois et des romains vainqueur.

Apart from occasional pieces, which may be disregarded as unimportant, Garnier wrote eight plays. The subjects of three are taken from Roman history at the period of the civil wars which ended the Republic ; three others are derived from subjects of Greek tragedy ; the seventh, "Les Juifves," is taken

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from the Bible. The last play, "Bradamante," was inspired by Ariosto's "Orlando," and is the first French tragi-comedy. Garnier's plays are a kind of prologue to French classic drama, a first tentative outline. Speaking roughly, we can say that Hardy represented a romantic tendency in French drama which made its mark on the earlier plays of Corneille, on Théophile, on Cyrano de Bergerac, and then disappeared about the middle of the seventeenth century. Garnier, whose work also impressed Corneille, represents the triumphal classical school, which can claim much of Corneille's best work, all of Racine's, and practically all French tragedy down to the nineteenth century. Garnier's model was Seneca, but a Seneca stripped of sensationalism; his plays are described by French critics as elegies in dramatic form. There is a certain amount of action in his later plays, especially "Bradamante," but in general that description fits them perfectly. The effect of Garnier's plays on later French drama can be loosely indicated by saying that "Bradamante" is the ancestor of Corneille's tragi-comedies, while "Hippolyte" and "Les Juifves" are related to Racine's "Phèdre" and "Athalie."

This influence was not confined to France, as Mr. Witherspoon points out in his "Influence of Robert Garnier on Elizabethan Drama." While Marlowe and Shakespeare were pandering to the mob with

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incorrect and vulgar pieces like "Tamberlaine" and "Romeo and Juliet," a small group of enlightened intellectuals, stimulated by the Countess of Pembroke, were endeavouring to uplift popular taste in England by translations and imitations of Garnier. The Countess herself translated Garnier's "Antoine," and Kyd, "Spanish Tragedy" Kyd (of all people!), made a version of "Cornélie"; be it said in extenuation that he was actuated by entirely mercenary motives. Two plays, Daniel's "Cleopatra" and Samuel Brandon's "Octavia," are direct imitations of Garnier's "Marc-Antoine" and "Cornélie." Fulke Greville's "Alabam" and "Mustapha," Daniel's "Philotas," Lord Sterling's four "Monarchicke Tragedies" and Elizabeth Carew's "Mariam" are all modelled on the Garnier type of tragedy. Daniel and Fulke Greville are now the least neglected of these authors, whose influence on the torrent of Elizabethan popular drama was almost nil. Obviously such of these writers as possessed real talent were lacking in dramatic ability. Like Garnier, they composed elegies in dramatic form with little or no thought of stage production; again like Garnier, some of their best passages come from the choruses. Some of Daniel's choruses to "Cleopatra" are "well enough," but poor things when compared with the lovely songs in his "Hymen's Triumph." Stirling's choruses are comically lugu-

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brious. None of these English and Scottish imitators approaches Garnier at his lyric best, especially his choruses to "Les Juifves" :

Comme veut-on que maintenant  
Si désolées  
Nous allions la flûte entonnant  
Dans ces valées ?  
Que le luth touché de nos dois  
Et la cithare  
Facent résonner de leur voix  
Un ciel barbare ?

The chorus is founded on the great psalm "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down," and is one of the few metrical paraphrases of the Bible not contemptible or ridiculous. The technique of the *Pléïade* served Garnier well here. Since his principal literary merit to a modern reader lies in these lyric wails of his choruses, I may perhaps be allowed to make another quotation from the same play :

Pauvres filles de Sion,  
Vos liesses sont passées ;  
La commune affliction  
Les a toutes effacées.

Ne luiront plus vos habits  
De soye avec l'or tissue ;  
La perle avec le rubis  
N'y sera plus apperceue.

La chaine qui dévaloit  
Sur vos gorges ivoirines  
Jamais comme elle souloit  
N'embellira vos poitrines.

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There is a pleasing melancholy in the cadence of these quatrains, and the reader will not fail to notice the easy technical skill with which they are turned; Ronsard himself was rarely a more cunning musician in words. Garnier's first tragedies are unexciting to an English reader, accustomed to the bustle and rapid changes of the Elizabethans. With Garnier all is decent, elevated, rigid with rules. Nothing happens on the stage; but one or two, at most four, people discuss, relate, and lament over what is happening elsewhere; from what they say it sounds interesting enough to make us wish they would go away and let us see the play. The first acts of "*Porcie*," "*Cornélie*," and "*Marc-Antoine*" contain only a prodigiously tumid and lengthy soliloquy and a chorus. The bulk of each play is taken up with the agonized declamations of a Portia, a Cornelia, a Cleopatra, a Phædra, who reiterate their intention of dying by their own hand, but are such an unconscionably long time about it that one wishes the confidante or the nuntius would quietly give the lady a dagger instead of arguing in sententious stichomythia or exhorting to resignation in non-stop sermons of three hundred alexandrines. Let no one cry out upon exaggeration; the first speech in "*Porcie*" contains 150 solid alexandrines, and much of Garnier's dialogue in the earlier tragedies is on the same scale. There is a suspicious similarity

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about these gruesome complaints which makes for monotony. Every new disaster is greeted with a symmetrical volley of "O's," as thus :

O cruelle fortune! O désastre exécration!  
O pestilente amour! O torche abominable!  
O plaisirs malheureux! O chétives beautés,  
O mortelles grandeurs, mortelles royautés !

And so on, with four more lines of "O" and another twenty nearly as exclamatory. It is obviously not our barbarous English way of writing tragedy; it is all noble, elevated, allusive; the lines hiss with Megæras and Gorgons, boil with Styxes and Phlegethons, while Clotho and "Atrope" are invoked so frequently we have not a shudder left for them. In "Hippolyte" a certain liveliness is caused by the nuntius who relates the death of the unhappy servant of Artemis, though even here we have a vague feeling of uneasiness caused by a recollection that we have read the same thing, done rather better, in Euripides. But a flash of "Gothick" inspiration here carries Garnier into realms unknown to Euripides: he has invented a truly genial monster to scare the horses of Hippolytus, a monster worthy of "Velvet" Breughel himself:

Il avoit d'un taureau la redoutable forme,  
De couleur azuré. Son col estoit couvert  
Jusques au bas du front d'une hure à poil vert.  
Son oreille estoit droite, et ses deux cornes dures

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Longues se bigarroyent de diverses peintures.  
Ses yeux estinceloient. Le feu de ses naseaux  
Sortait en respirant comme de deux fourneaux.  
Son estomac espois luy hérissoit de mousse.  
Il avoit aux costez une grand' tache rousse.  
Depuis son large col qu'il eslevoit crineux,  
Il monstroît tout le dos doublement espineux.  
Il avoit au derrière une monstreuse taille,  
Qui s'armoit jusqu'au bas d'une pierreuse escaille.

And the "preux Hippolyte" actually was foolhardy enough to attack that monster with an "espieu." It was surely tempting fate. The subject of "La Troade" supplies Garnier with a fertile theme for his eloquence; never has the "mobled queen" so excelled herself as in these pages of furious lamentation. Indeed, if there be any truth in M. Pinvert's assertion that Shakespeare may have been inspired by Garnier, the place to look for the influence is the Player's speech in "Hamlet"; it is the only thing in Shakespeare which resembles the style of Garnier. But we must remember that Garnier is a pioneer, and that it is cruel to compare him with the gods. It is greatly to his credit that he succeeded in transplanting the Senecan tragedy into French and that his plays steadily got better as he went on. He abandoned the enormous soliloquies, brought more actors on to the stage, introduced even some dramatic action, cut up his long speeches into dialogue, and reduced the chorus to a pleasant lyrical intermezzo. In "Bradamante" there is action, no chorus, and

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the characters are humanly recognizable ; the wonderfully tumid diction even is there restrained to less overwhelming proportions. Charlemagne is quite an amiable old gentleman ; Roger is a little given to rhetorical exercises, but deserves to win his Bradamante.

“ *Les Juifves* ” and “ *Antigone* ” are the best of the tragedies ; “ *Les Juifves* ” is really excellent, especially in the lyrical portions, where Garnier seems to have been inspired beyond his usual standard.

The interest of these plays is relative. They belong to a transitional period, when the medieval drama of France had become exhausted and the Renaissance drama was still in its experimental stages. Garnier is a little frightening to modern readers because of the awe-inspiring heights of language at which he ruthlessly keeps his characters. He is a less human person than Grévin, but he is less primitive ; Grévin’s plays are oddly incomplete, he seems “ scant o’ breath ” and invariably winds up a scene with abruptness just as the reader is growing warmed to the situation. Garnier, on the other hand, works out his scenes much more effectively, and, if anything, he is too long-winded. But he was gradually learning to construct a play, to make his characters human, to create action, to be interesting, when, for some unknown reason, he ceased to write. He lives, then, on his fame as a pioneer, as a

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predecessor of Corneille and Racine. It is an honourable place in literature.

“Œuvres Complètes de Robert Garnier.” Notice par Lucien Pinvert. Two volumes. (Paris : Garnier.)

“The Influence of Robert Garnier on Elizabethan Drama.” By Alexander Maclaren Witherspoon. (Yale University Press.)



## X

### FRENCH SATIRISTS

ONE result of the Romantic movement in the last century, under whose influence many of our critical judgments are formed, is that satire, so highly placed and enjoyed by the eighteenth century, is disparaged and neglected. "Satire is not poetry" is a common remark; and, since it is vague, sweeping and inexact, is not easy to answer in a phrase; except by the counter-assertion "*Satire is poetry.*" The complete answer, of course, is the works of the great satirical poets. There is an interesting expression of the romantic aversion for satire in a scholarly and sensitive essay by Mr. Tiddy, called "*Satura and Satire.*" After analysing the works of several classical and modern satirists, Mr. Tiddy remarks: "I should hesitate to call this poetry, but if forced to do so, I should set it in the lowest rank of poetry, since pure satire expresses the narrowest and most one-sided view of life." Does it? Perhaps Mr. Tiddy would not allow that Aristophanes and Swift are "pure"

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satirists; but they are certainly satirists, and assuredly not "narrow" and "one-sided." But might we not ask in what respects Juvenal is more "narrow" and "one-sided" than Tibullus, or Dryden than Spenser, or Bishop Hall than Carew? Mr. Tiddy notes that "vitality" is a distinguishing quality of good satire. That is a very valuable quality in all literature, and one not universally evident in poetry. Perhaps, if satire introduces new vitality into a poetic literature which has grown languid and remote from life, it may be found not so despicable and unnecessary. Vigorous indignation and hatred are the corollary of vigorous love and admiration: the former is as able to produce great poetry as the latter. If the "pure satire" of the Elizabethans be on the whole mediocre and extravagant, no one can deny that satire is a frequent and often valuable ingredient in the dramatists, a "sharp sawce" to stimulate, to redeem from insipidity. Some of the vitality of Elizabethan drama, its direct contact with life, comes from this satirical vein. Jonson and Marston are full of it; most of the others possess it in varying degrees. Even Shakespeare has a great satirist in him. We are so fond of praising "honey-tongued Will" that we forget the sharp dose of vinegar which prevents the honey from cloying.

Satire is literature militant: those who wholly

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condemn satire forget that Pallas holds a spear as well as a spray of olive, that she bears the head of Medusa on her shield. It is no mere coincidence that satire has flourished most vigorously in the great military nations, the Romans and the French. From the earliest times satire has been noted as a trait in the French character: in the time of Cato it was almost a proverbial saying that the Gauls loved two things—fighting and keen speech. Not only in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but in every century of French literature, satire has been one of its most important features. The great contribution of France to European culture is the critical spirit, and one form of expression of the critical spirit is satire. And the tradition of satire is older than Villon. "Satire," says M. Lenient, "is the completest manifestation of free thought in the Middle Ages"; and again:

Never perhaps in any age or country has satire been more universal and more varied. It adopts all shapes, speaks all tongues: viol, pen, brush, chisel are so many instruments at its disposal. Through the mouths of minstrels, satire throws into the public square the first darings of modern liberty; it clings, grimacing and capricious, upon the porches of cathedrals, and even upon the stone of tombs; it brings back the remnants of ancient saturnalia to the bosom of the Church, erects its profane stage opposite the sacred mysteries, inaugurates the terrible power of the mind (*esprit*) which has killed so many things in France, and has survived them. This counterpart to the feudal and religious world forms a vast trilogy, each century of which is an act, while every act

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has its principal hero : in the thirteenth century, **Renart** ; in the fourteenth, the Devil ; in the fifteenth, Death.

But this immense diffusion of the satirical spirit throughout French literature has had the effect of limiting the output of formal satire, the "pure satire" of Mr. Tiddy. The four volumes published by MM. Fleuret and Perceau contain specimens from the works of formal satirists during two centuries : the much larger bulk of satirical poetry has been omitted—the songs, epigrams, tales in verse, octosyllables, stanzas, and all anonymous works. Even so, nearly one hundred authors are represented, and it is a little difficult to understand why MM. Fleuret and Perceau feel that France is so poor in formal satire : it can only be by comparison with the almost incalculable mass of "informal" or "impure" satire. Certainly it would need some thought and research to produce even fifty English writers of "pure" satire from the same periods, if it be remembered that several minor names quoted by the authors of manuals—John Davies of Hereford, Taylor the Water-Poet, for instance—yield no formal satire, but only epigrams and oddments.

To describe the varying physiognomy of nearly one hundred poets is plainly impossible within the limits of an article. The best that can be done is to indicate the main groups into which these satirists appear to fall. Disregarding the minute

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classification of French critics, we may roughly place these poets in three main groups, allowing for a certain number of exceptions.

The first group covers practically the whole of the sixteenth century, and the satire circles about two great and correlated events—the Reformation and the Civil Wars. The poets in this group are generally in earnest, and are sincerely moved to protest, denunciation or despair by the ferocious contests and resulting misfortunes of their countrymen. There exist an elevation of tone, a nobility of purpose, in some poets of this group—especially Ronsard and d'Aubigné—which far transcend the mere malice, the æsthetic repulsiveness, the lascivious drollery, of later French satirists. But the corrective influence of the classics is less marked; and, except in the great poets like Ronsard and d'Aubigné, medieval forms and manners, medieval diffuseness and wordiness, are obvious. The medieval themes for satire—women, clergy, lawyers, nobles—appear alongside or mingled with the great theme of the “*Misères du Royaume de France*.” There is practically no English equivalent to this group.

The second group covers the first half of the seventeenth century. These are the “*poètes libertins*,” the satirists from wantonness, creators of “*une laideur idéale et fantastique*,” whose great poet is Mathurin Regnier. Imitation of the Roman satirists,



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Persius, Juvenal and Horace, is a marked characteristic of these writers; but medieval *gauloiserie* and Italian satire of the schools of Ariosto, Pietro Aretino, and even Berni, were equally important ingredients. Moreover, the taste of the "bon roy, Henri IV," who delighted in satire, stimulated the growth of a horde of courtly and rather filthy satirists. The moral indignation feigned by these poets is nearly always false; but that should not prevent the reader from perceiving their genuine gifts, which are hatred of ugliness, witty malice, an uncouth but most amusing *verve*. Their ability to spit out the oddest combinations of syllables, the most grotesque epithets, their Rabelaisian fertility in building up pyramids of exaggerated abuse, are quite delightful to those who are able to enjoy them. Their English equivalent is the school of satirists which includes Hall, Marston, Donne and a number of others. Of them it may be asserted that they succeeded in their object, a purely artistic and non-moral object: and that was the creation of "une laideur idéale et fantastique." They are, indeed, the "fantasists" of satire; odd, whimsical, sarcastic fellows, littered under Saturn when the sun was in Scorpio, given to humours and melancholy; but in their works diverting enough, provided we do not ask them for qualities they did not attempt to cultivate.



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The third group, covering the second part of the seventeenth century, has Boileau for its head, and might be described as the school of Horace in a bag-wig. They are sly, malicious, well-bred, venomous and polished. Not for them are the prophet-like denunciations of d'Aubigné, the bludgeonings of Desportes and Estienne, the quaint mouthings of Sigogne and Saint-Amant. Like perfect gentlemen, they are to establish the rules of good sense and the usage of the Court by sneering at everything else. Says Charles Perrault (1628-1703):

Je ne viens pas tonner contre l'horreur des vices,  
Contre les trahisons, contre les injustices,  
Ni sur le crime affreux répandre un fiel amer.

The *fiel amer*, of which they had plenty, was chiefly used in the persecution of private enemies, in disparaging rivals, and, incidentally, in ridiculing anything that did not happen to be fashionable. It has long been the tradition to depreciate these poets as lacking in imagination and warmth of feeling; the objection may be founded, but it cannot be denied that they possess a precise and consummate knowledge of the human heart.

The chief objection to French satire of the sixteenth century is its monotony of subject-matter and generally diffuse manner. Some indication of the confusion and misery of the French Civil Wars is

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given by Ronsard's "Remonstrance au Peuple de France." The poet, though a Christian, revolts against the misery, cannot understand how God can see things and not be moved to pity for the innocent and true believers, to revenge against the heretics :

Es-tu dedans un throsne assis sans rien faire ?

He taunts the Almighty with His indifference to heretics :

Ne les puniras-tu, souverain Createur ?  
Tiendras-tu leur parti ? veux-tu que l'on t'appelle  
Le Seigneur des larrons et le Dieu de querelle ?

This fanatical hatred in the name of Christianity is a strange chapter of European history. When we read the amazing and wholly sincere prayer for the destruction of enemies which concludes this anti-Protestant diatribe we cannot help marvelling that a man so civilized, so cultured, as Ronsard could fall into these puerile impieties against not only Divine charity, but mere human kindness and common sense ; yet not so long ago we might everywhere hear sincere echoes of the dreadful sentiments expressed in these lines :

Dieu tout grand et tout beau, qui habites les nues,  
Et qui cognois l'auteur des guerres advenues,  
Dieu qui regarde tout, qui vois tout et entens ;  
Donne, je te suppli', que l'herbe du printemps

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Si tost parmi les champs nouvelle ne fleurisse,  
Que l'auteur de ces maux au combat ne perisse,  
Ayant le corselet d'outre en outre enfoncé  
D'une pique ou d'un plomb fatalement poussé,  
Donne que de son sang il enivre la terre,  
Et que ses compagnons, au milieu de la guerre,  
Renversez à ses pieds, haletans et ardents,  
Mordent dessus la champ la poudre entre leurs dens,  
Estendus l'un sur l'autre, et que la multitude  
Que s'assure en ton nom, franche de servitude,  
De fleurs bien-couronnée, à haute voix, Seigneur,  
Tout à l'entour des morts celebre ton honneur,  
Et d'un cantique saintet chante, de race en race,  
Au peuples avenir tes vertues et ta grace !

The note of exclamation at the end seems well placed. This tone of almost frantic, unreasoning hatred is to be met with in other satirists of the period who attacked the same subject of the misfortunes of the Civil Wars. For Ronsard, as we have seen, the heretics were the cause of God's anger ; for Jean Vatel, who apparently lost his property through their violence, the foreign mercenaries were the cause of all the trouble :

Mais depuis qu'on a veu le marran Espagnol,  
Et l'Alleman yvrogne, et l'Italien mol,  
Comme loups affamez envahir nostre France,  
Deslors, abandonnée à toute incontinence,  
Elle, a perdu son teinct, sa forme et sa splendeur.

Among all these satirists on either side in the Civil Wars there is one noble character and one great

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voice—that is the Protestant soldier and poet, Agrippa d'Aubigné. Critical distinctions between “pure” and “impure” satire vanish before the flame of d'Aubigné's indignation, the molten torrent of his verse. “*Les Tragiques*” is that rare, almost unique phenomenon in French literature—a white-hot poem of denunciation which is yet magnanimous and public-spirited, the writer losing sight of himself in his devotion to a cause. “*Les Tragiques*” was written by a soldier of the Reformed Church in the midst of the battles and scenes he describes—“*Chant vengeur, poème héroïque, martyrologe enthousiaste, diatribe haineuse, chronique exacte et passionnée,*” says M. Lenient. An extraordinary experience is granted the reader of “*Les Tragiques*” when he is caught by its grandeur and force. Juvenal, the Bible, Homer, Lucan, all contributed towards “*Les Tragiques*,” its epic combats, its rapid historical sketches, its extraordinary visions and invective.

Through the delirium of fever [says M. Lenient, who has a profound knowledge and appreciation of d'Aubigné] he saw about his bed the radiant figures of Moses, Gideon, Judas Maccabæus, Coligny, defenders of the oppressed people; opposed to them, the hated types of the Pharaohs, Heliogabalus, Nero, Charles IX, Henri II, Catherine de' Medici. All these phantoms, some evoked from the depths of antiquity, others from the arena of modern times, were confounded for d'Aubigné in a sort of dreadful nightmare, in which the volleying arquebuses of Moncontour and Jarnac crashed with the thunders of Sinai and the trumpets of Jericho. This

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poem runs like a rough and noisy torrent across the sixteenth century, like the Cocytus of the ancients, formed from the tears and sobs of humanity.

This is great, almost inflated, praise; but "*Les Tragiques*" is a work which has the power of arousing enthusiasm. It is something more than a satire, but its satirical passages have a ringing scorn and eloquence which are most inspiring; to choose one passage which will support praise given to a long and varied poem is not easy, but the following denunciation of the successful courtier is a fair specimen of d'Aubigné's milder vein of invective:

Il reste que le corps, comme l'accoustrement,  
Soit aux loix de la Cour; marcher mignonnement,  
Trainer les pieds, mener les bras, hocher la teste  
Pour bransler à propos d'un pennache la creste,  
Garnir et bas et haut de roses et de nœuds,  
Les dents de muscadins, de poudre les cheveux;  
Fay toy dedans la foule une importune voye,  
Te montre ardent à voir affin que l'on te voye,  
Lance regards tranchants pour estre regardé,  
Le teint de blanc d'Espagne et de rouge fardé.  
Que la main, que le sein y prennent leur partage;  
Couvre d'un parasol en esté ton visage,  
Jette (comme effrayé) en femme quelques cris,  
Mesprise ton effroy par un traistre sousris,  
Fais le begue, le las, d'une voix molle et claire,  
Ouvre ta languissante et pesante paupière;  
Sois pensif, retenu, froid, secret et finet:  
Voilà pour devenir garce du Cabinet,  
A la porte duquel laisse Dieu, cœur et honte,  
Ou je travaille en vain en te faisant ce conte.



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The other satirists of this age are distinctly less interesting. The poets of the Pléiade were lyric and elegiac rather than satiric, though du Bellay, when he poured out his bitterness in "Les Regrets," mingled a certain amount of satire with elegiac melancholy. His literary satire against the followers of Petrarch and the poem, "La Vieille Courtisane," quoted by MM. Fleury and Perceau, suffer by an excessive diffusion. The quaintest of all these sixteenth-century satirists is Antoine du Verdier, who made a speciality of queer and enormous rhymes, only to be paralleled by Browning at his most extravagant. He rhymes "moustarde" with "moult tard," "Veis-tu pere" with "vitu-pere," "Soixante deux" with "soi sente d'eux"; and invents the most diverting couplets, like this preposterous cacophony :

L'église apostolique appelant Babilon,  
Des misteres divins or' ainsi babille on. . .

English poetry was comparatively barren of satire in the sixteenth century, until the last decade when Hall and Marston published their works and Donne was privately circulated. Gascoigne is still medieval and allegorical. Sir Thomas Wyatt had read Horace and observed life; his satires have a turn of homely good sense which is rather rare at this period.

The poets of the second group, who wrote chiefly during the first half of the seventeenth century, are



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an interesting set. Some of them, like Regnier, Sigogne, d'Esternod, are wholly satirists, or nearly so. Others, like Saint-Amant, François Maynard and the delightful Théophile de Viau, are only at times satirical ; at other times they are quite exquisite lyric poets. The satire of this group is a kind of Gargantuan burlesque ; its most marked trait is the " ideal and fantastic ugliness," which has already been mentioned, created in derision ; its style is intentionally uncouth and its images far-fetched—but if it be sometimes monstrous this style is remarkable for *verve* and for picturesque ugliness. To look upon it as moral censure is to miss the point. It is purely farcical :

These are no men, but apparitions,  
Ignes fatui, glowworms, fictions,  
Meteors, rats of Nilus, fantasies,  
Colosses, pictures, shades, resemblances

Learned English critics assert that the satire of Donne, Hall, Marston, and others of the period derives its peculiarities of style from a misunderstanding of Persius and Juvenal. French critics, dealing with the equivalent school in their own country, say it is the "ancien esprit gaulois." But it is difficult to believe that Donne and Hall were so ignorant ; or that the "ancien esprit gaulois" alone created the school of Regnier. In all Renaissance

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and early post-Renaissance art a sound principle is to look to Italy for the origins. The extraordinary mud-combats of the humanists, the ferocious *verve* of Aretino, the curious irony of Berni, the numerous Italian satirists, these were perhaps the true origins of the satire of Sigogne and Marston quite as much as the "ancien esprit gaulois" and misreadings of the classics. But these questions of influence and derivation are only important if they help us to understand a poet's meaning and purpose. Here I would merely suggest that the satirists of this school were not really clumsy fools or hypocrites; they were burlesque poets, "qui narguent le monde," scoffing fellows, ancestors of Laforgue, Tristan Corbière and the Verlaine of "Parallèlement."

Je suis le fou de Pampelune,  
J'ai peur du rire de la lune,  
Cafarde, avec son crêpe noir. . . .  
Horreur ! tout est donc sous un éteignoir ?

Mathurin Regnier wrote more under the influence of Horace; but though his good taste prevented him from falling into the extravagant, if amusing, rhetoric of some of his disciples and predecessors, he is by no means averse from the Muse of burlesque—if there be such a Muse—whom he invokes in these diverting terms :

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O Muse, je t'invoque : emmielle moy le bec,  
Et bande de tes mains les nerfs de ton rebec ;  
Laisse moy là Phœbus chercher son aventure,  
Laisse moy son Bémol, prends la clef de Nature.

This invocation precedes one of those burlesque "portraits" in which this school of satirists delighted, both English and French. The following lines, which are typical of thousands, may be cited as some proof of the contention that these satirists had really no moral purpose but the purely æsthetic object of creating an ideal ugliness :

Mais non, venons à luy, dont la maussade mine  
Ressemble un de ces Dieux des couteaux de la Chine ;  
Et dont les beaux discours, plaisamment estourdis,  
Feroient crever de rire un Saintet de Paradis.  
Son teint jaune, enfumé, de couleur de malade,  
Feroit donner au Diable, et ceruze, et pommade ;  
Et n'est blanc en Espagne, a qui ce Cormoran  
Ne fasse renier la loy d'Alcoran.  
Ses yeux borde de rouge, esgarez, sembloient estre.  
L'un à Montmartre, et l'autre au Chateau de Bicestre. . .  
Son nez haut revelé semblait faire la nique  
A l'Ovide Nason, au Scipion Nasique,  
Où maints rubis balez, tous rougissants de vin  
Montroient un *Hac itur* à la Pomme de pin ;  
Et preschant la vendage, asséuroient en leur trogne,  
Qu'un jeune Medecin vit moins qu'un vieux yvrogne.  
Sa bouche est grosse et torte, et semble en son profil,  
Cella-la d'Alizon, qui retordant du fil,  
Fait la moue aux passans, et féconde en grimace,  
Bave comme au Printemps une veille limace . . . etc.

This portrait of a pedant comes from the famous "Satyre X" of Regnier, which impressed Boileau

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so much that he imitated it. But one point worth observing is that many of the lines in this characteristic production of the "ancien esprit gaulois" are translated from an Italian satirist named Caporali, among whose poems will be found a satire, "del Pedante." It is quite obvious that the English and French satirists of this period did model themselves partly upon Juvenal, Persius, and even Horace. But the evidence of their imitating Italian satirists is also strong. What is more interesting for us is to find the curious similarity between the English and French satirists of the same period. We can parallel Regnier with Donne and the fantastic mouthings of Sigogne, Annibal de Lortigues, and many others with the stout "barmy froth" of Marston and the author of "Microcynicon." Donne is the greatest of all of them, far above even Regnier. His conceits are so much more profound, surprising, and satisfying than theirs. Donne, indeed, is quaint and uncouth enough; he can rival any French "libertin" in those qualities and in daring, contemptuous thought; but they cannot rival him in imagination and in his ability to condense meaning into a short phrase. All through his satires Donne perpetually rushes up in some gigantic swoop of thought and then abruptly flutters down to stony or marshy ground; as when he reflects that a good heathen may be saved and a bad Christian damned :

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. . . and shall thy father's spirit  
Meet blind philosophers in Heaven, whose merit  
Of strict life may be imputed faith, and hear  
Thee, whom he taught so easy ways, and near  
To follow, damn's ?

As for the school of "barmy froth," it is equally diverting as burlesque both in English and French ; and to allot the wreath of supreme ridiculousness between d'Esternod and Marston is almost impossible.

The third group of French satirists contains Scarron, Saint-Evremond, and the glory of French formal satire, Boileau. By this time satire has become Horatian and disciplined ; has abandoned all the "barmy froth" which makes the early period so diverting. The grave defect of this set of satirists is flatness—a reaction from the excess of their immediate predecessors. But where the minor writers of Regnier's school and Donne's school are amusing with their bluster and "Ruffe-raffe roaring," the minor imitators of Pope and Boileau are simply dull, lacking, as they do, the concentrated venom, the epigrammatic and antithetical turn to the couplet, the straight, sharp stab. Marston and Hall lay about them with club and halberd : Boileau and Pope use the rapier. But a clumsy use of the rapier is wholly ineffective and disappointing as a spectacle ; while the clumsiest fellow with stout lungs and muscles can produce some effective cudgel-play. To measure the gap between Boileau and his "Gothick"



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predecessors we have only to open his satires at random :

La Satire, en leçons, en nouveautés fertile,  
Sait seule assaisonner le Plaisant et l'Utile,  
Et d'un vers qu'elle épure aux rayons du bon sens,  
Détromper les Esprits des erreurs de leurs temps.  
Elle seul, bravant l'orgueil et l'injustice,  
Va jusques sous le dais faire pastir le vice ;  
Et souvent sans rien craindre, à l'aide d'un bon mot,  
Va venger la Raison des attentats d'un sot.

The pleasures of literature, as of all the fine arts, are many and various. The creator of new art is almost forced to be narrow in appreciation, strictly limited in his admiration ; that work which resembles or helps on his own he will praise, and he will reject or depreciate the rest. For the critic and for the public, who desire to enjoy and to comprehend as much as possible, these limitations do not exist ; they may be allowed a wider scope of passive enjoyment because they are unable to taste the intenser, active joys of creation. Among so large a number as a hundred poets there must, even in selections, be much ordinary work and much work which is interesting for very different reasons and in very different ways. To attempt to appreciate the satirical writings of Ronsard, d'Aubigné, Régnier, Sigogne, Saint-Amant, Saint-Evremond and Boileau is a useful essay in catholicity of taste. Each is good in

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its way, and the several separate ways are very different. They form an interesting, if minor, part of French poetry, which is the minor half of French literature.

“Les Satires Françaises du XVI<sup>e</sup> Siècle.” Par F. Fleuret et L. Perceau. “Les Satires Françaises du XVII<sup>e</sup> Siècle.” Par F. Fleuret et L. Perceau. (Paris : Garnier.)

## XI

### FOLASTRIES

“**L**E CABINET SATYRIQUE” is a remarkable collection of satiric and erotic sixteenth-century poems by the greatest poets of that age, a typically Renaissance production which for long has been almost unobtainable outside the great public libraries. MM. Fleuret and Perceau are performing a service to all students of French literature by their reprints of early satirists. I have discussed elsewhere their four-volume anthology of satirists and their editions of Sigogne and d’Esternod; they now give us the “Cabinet Satyrique,” and announce for the future editions of Pierre Motin and Mathurin Regnier, the last named being the best remembered French satirist before Boileau.

The scope of this once-famous anthology may be indicated by the following facts. It contains 460 poems, 319 of which can be more or less definitely attributed to known poets. These poets go as far back in the sixteenth century as to include Clément Marot and Melin de Saint-Gelais. Besides many

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which are obscure, we find the names of Baïf, Guillaume Bautru (Comte de Serrant, Conseiller au Grand Conseil), Remy Belleau, Théodore de Bèze (the successor of Calvin), Colletet (one of the founders of the Académie Française), the Princesse de Conti (Louise de Lorraine, daughter of the Duc de Guise), Desportes, Vauquelin des Yvetaux, Amadis Jamyn (Ronsard's page), Estienne Jodelle, Malherbe, M. A. Muret (the great humanist), the Marquis de Racan, Mathurin Regnier, Ronsard, Sigogne, Jacques Tahureau, and Verville (author of "Le Moyen de Parvenir"). It will be seen that most of the best French poets of the sixteenth century were drawn on for the collection ; if the composition of Renaissance satire and *gauloiseries* be so reprehensible an affair as stern critics tell us, it must be conceded that the culprits in this case are so eminent that they cannot be treated as either "oddities" or "insanitary lampooners," unless, of course, we are prepared to bestow such titles upon Ronsard and the whole Pléiade, Malherbe, Marot, Racan and Regnier. Not to have heard of Sigogne and Tahureau is no crime ; but those who take an interest in the rise and fall of literary *genres* in Europe may perhaps be pardoned for their curiosity concerning the lost art of poetic satire. An enlightened age will doubtless produce more edifying and refined works than the "Cabinet Satyrique" ; but it may be defied

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to produce one-tenth of the humour, invective, *verdeur*, fantasy and poetic vigour showed in these reprehensible "oddities." These poets belong to a far-off age, untrammelled by rules of good taste and conventional morals, the France of the Valois and Henri IV, where men lived and died hard. They and their art are extinct, and here is their *oraison funèbre* :

Cy gist un Poète Satyrique  
Qui l'art d'Amour sçeut expliquer ;  
Dames, gardez qu'il ne vous pique,  
Ou qu'il ne vous face piquer.

If the modern commentator is forced to apologize for these poets, the case was different in their own time. A poet named d'Audiguier, having ventured to criticize an Ode to Queen Marguerite written by a certain de Maillet, received this "sonnet injurieux," after having been informed in prose that he (d'Audiguier) was a "sot versificateur" :

### CONTRE UN POÈTE.

Excrement de Parnasse, erreur de la nature,  
Seulement imparfaite en ce qu'elle t'a fait ;  
On ne la voit rougir que pour voir cet effect  
Ny se defigurer que par ceste figure.

Dieu ! que c'est à l'oreille une triste aventure  
D'ouyr la voix qui sort d'un gosier tant infect,  
Et sa crasse ignorance est jointe à tel meffect  
Qu'elle accuse d'aigreur les doux airs de Mercure !

Hibou, pour ton foible œil je luys trop vivement,  
L'excez de ma lumiere est ton aveuglement ;  
Ouy donc la verité qui, contre loy despite,

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T'apprent que Maillet parle ainsi qu'on faict aux Cieux,  
Et que, s'il n'egaloit en parler tous les Dieux,  
Il ne devoit parler de ceste Marguerite.

As the response of d'Audiguier shows, the first line aroused indignation, and even deprived the offended victim of the customary *verve*. But it is rare to find a page in this book without a jest, a phrase, or a fantasy worthy of Rabelais. In fact, one of the results which emerge from a study of our "oddities" is the realization that Rabelais was not a unique phenomenon in French literature, nor were his style, language and method peculiar to himself. If one may make the comparison, Rabelais was simply the greatest of a school of satirists, as William Shakespeare was the greatest of a school of dramatic poets. Here in the "Cabinet Satyrique" are a few of Rabelais's predecessors, contemporaries, and followers; in their poems will be found reflections and echoes of that indescribable and gigantic fooling which only the word "Rabelaisian" describes. Here is that burlesque imagination which played with giants, the same imagination which created the fantastic myth of large noses finally embodied in Cyrano de Bergerac's *légende*. Here, too, is that traditional praise of carousals in taverns which goes back beyond the "franches repues" (attributed to Villon) to the Goliards of a remoter age—a traditional celebration of the

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coarse joys of eating and drinking which was only tamed into insignificance by the morals of the last century. A *gaillardise* by no less a person than Pierre de Ronsard might easily be inserted into the pages of "Gargantua" without incongruity.

Ayant rongé mille saucisses,  
Mille pastez tous plains d'espices ;  
Ayant maint flacon rehumé  
Et mangé maint brezil fumé . . .

sounds like an episode from the spacious career of Friar John of the Funnels. This Renaissance joy in living springs up like one of those wanton, cheerful, pagan fountains which may still be met with in Italy—a specimen of which has been joyously described by the *curé* of Meudon himself. The strength and optimism of life in such an age showed itself in a thousand ways ; no barriers could restrain its impetuosity, no counsels of elderly discouragement wither its enterprise. Renaissance poetry shows the same positive strength and the same variety of forms of energy ; every kind of poetry, from drama to epigram, from elegy to burlesque, was enthusiastically cultivated. *Genres* were not rigidly defined, and satire and burlesque, erotic and descriptive poetry all met and mingled one with the other ; beauty and vituperation, sensuality and refinement, grossness and loveliness are all comprehended under the one heading of "satire," for which the only

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appropriate definition is contained in Ronsard's phrase, "la licence effrénée de la jeunesse." It was indeed the licence of young minds in a youthful age, the irrepressible and wanton play of great poets and princesses, magistrates, soldiers, reformers, gentlemen adventurers. The "Cabinet Satyrique" is for modern critics a collection of gross and indecent poems by human "oddities"; yet its authors were the friends of kings, and Tallemant tells us that it was read by Anne of Austria and the Duchesse de Chevreuse. The eighteenth-century master of good taste described Shakespeare as a drunken savage and Rabelais as a gross buffoon; that savagery and buffoonery may be found in the French Renaissance satirists. Here is an example of their "gross lack of taste":

Autour de ses regards, comme autour des fleurettes  
 Volloient les papillons, volloient les amourettes,  
 Qui, de ris affetez et d'attraits gracieux  
 Et des plus doux appas mon ame allangouree  
 Des plaisirs qu'aime tant la belle Citheree . . .

Si j'estois un grand Roy, je ferois, sur ceste herbe,  
 Eriger à Venus un temple fort superbe,  
 Où, certains jours de l'an, la jeunesse de Tours  
 Viendroit solemniser ses mignardes amours,  
 Et tous les passetemps, et toutes les liesses,  
 Les baisers, les devis, les ris, et les caresses,  
 Dont nous paradisons en ce lieu nos esprits,  
 Travaillons au mestier de la douce Cipris,  
 Car un lieu si secret et si propre aux delices  
 D'amour, merite bien autels et sacrifices. . .

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Without extensive quotation it is not possible to show the variety and versatility of the poets in this volume. It can only be expressed otherwise by asking the reader to suppose that the characters in Rabelais should all turn poet and that their different productions should be printed helter-skelter in one large anthology with no particular order. Such a supposition gives some idea of the unseemly nature of some of the poems, the burlesque exaggeration of others, the wit and sharp satire, the flashes of beauty, above all, the truly amazing vigour of language.

French poetry is some centuries older than English ; it had already produced a large body of works in various *genres* when Chaucer wrote his "Canterbury Tales," and it might be seriously asked whether the output before 1650 is not superior to that written afterwards. The poetry of France during the last three centuries is abundant and often of very high quality, but it lacks that vigorous and imaginative diction we prize in the Elizabethans. It is quite a pardonable error to suppose that such diction never existed in France, but it is an error. True, no French poet has ever handled French with the power and imagination of Shakespeare, and French drama was much more quickly dominated by classical ideas of sobriety, elegance and correctness. But as one examines French poetry between the "Chanson de Roland" in the eleventh century and, say, Corneille, 138

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before the reforms of the Academy took effect, the conviction gradually increases that France did once possess a poetic diction of extraordinary imaginative vigour. French was once a picturesque language ;

Un visage couperosé  
Estincelé de bubelettes,  
Un nez tout semé de rosettes  
Assis sur un rouge muzeau,

is no bad counterpart to Fluellen's " his face is all bubukles, and whelks, and knobs, and flames o' fire." It is the same kind of undisciplined picturesqueness. But French poetry, ancient and recent, was particularly strong in epigram and song ; the eighteenth century was prodigiously fertile in both. The sixteenth-century epigram is never polite but is often stinging ; for example, this by Davity on a light lady :

L'autre jour, Madame Françon,  
Se voyant estre soupçonnée,  
S'est par une estrange façon,  
Publiquement abandonnée,  
Afin qu'on n'eust plus de soupçon.

That lyric ease and grace, which now seem to have deserted French poetry, may be found even in the most indelicate pieces of the " Cabinet Satyrique." But there are plenty of well-turned poems, charming in matter as well as in form. One of Maynard's poems begins thus :

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Il est temps que l'Amour d'une belle Couronne  
De mirthe et de laurier mes cheveux environne ;  
Je tient entre mes bras, apres tant de mepris,  
La belle qui m'a pris.

Elsewhere in the same heterogeneous collection may be found echoes of the delightful Carnival Songs of Florence and memories of the *pastourelles* of medieval France. Generally, of course, they turn to invective or "licence effrénée," since this is a collection of satirists, and parodies of Ronsard and du Bellay are common ; but many a charming snatch of song can be found even in the "Enfer" of the Satirists. What charming malice there is in this opening of a song by Motin :

Que j'ayme ces petits rivages  
Semez de fleurettes sauvages !  
Beaux yeux à l'amour destinez,  
Je le cognois, vous en venez !

"Folastries" was the word invented by Ronsard to describe his own exercises in this sort of verse, which is partly satiric, partly erotic, partly Bacchic, always picturesque, and seldom more than half serious. It is a good word for them—the wanton frolics of the Renaissance Muse.

"Le Cabinet Satyrique." D'après l'édition originale de 1618. Edité par Fernand Fleuret et Louis Perceau. Deux volumes. (Paris : Librairie du Bon Vieux Temps.)

## XII

### MLLE DE LANCLOS

LIKE other famous courtesans, Ninon de Lenclos (or Lenclos or L'Enclos) has received from posterity an amount of admiring attention which is perhaps not wholly intellectual. Those who find the scandals of to-day too crude and blatant are not always averse from the more mellow scandals of the aristocratic centuries. But Ninon was no ordinary courtesan; she was something more than the founder or patroness of the long line of elegant and accomplished cocottes whose adventures and caprices make a favourite topic for writers on the *ancien régime*. She was a kind of female sophist, a courtesan by temperament and necessity, but also a woman of great charm, of some intellect, whose salon was both a centre of ideas and discussions and a school of fine manners. It was held that young men who had frequented her acquired a grace and charm of manner and conversation immediately perceptible, and such as not even the Court could entirely give. Saint Simon, who certainly must

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have disapproved of her "philosophy" and her way of life, praises her highly. The most "honnêtes princesses" did not exact more respect and exterior decency (he says), and Ninon's friends were chosen from the most select spirits at Court, so that it became the fashion to be received by her. She permitted no gambling, no horse-laughter, no disputes, no religious and political arguments—"tout y était délicat, léger, mesuré et formait les conversations qu'elle sut soutenir par son esprit et par tout ce qu'elle savait de faits de tout âge."

Nearly all Ninon's contemporaries praise her in similar terms; exceptions, like Mme de Sévigné, are easily accounted for—to lose both a husband and a son to the siren was too much. Ninon had many virtues, moral as well as intellectual. Her contemporaries said she was the most "honnête homme" among women. She attracts us still by her frankness, her sincerity, her courage, her wit. She first astounded and then delighted her age by embodying a sort of feminine emancipation movement which was not without effect on French life. She was a living protest against the marriage of an estate with a *dot*, one of the first of modern women in that her life was a claim to a reasonable parity with that of men. She refused to accept the convention that a woman's virtues were chastity and submission to a man; that was altogether too obvious

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a pretext for masculine tyranny. What was virtue in a man must also be virtue in a woman. There were salons in France before Ninon's, and the tradition of intellectual women went back at least as far as Marguerite of Navarre; but Ninon proved that a woman could live as independently as a man and yet retain dignity, charm, influence and exact respect. That is not at all uncommon in our days; it was almost unique in the seventeenth century.

When legend and apocrypha are taken away, the life and works of Ninon are reduced to slight proportions. Many of the letters attributed to her are spurious. The collection addressed to Sévigné (still kept in print among the classiques Garnier) was written by Damours; and the correspondence with Villarceaux and Mme de Maintenon is equally without authenticity. The authentic correspondence is much less popular than these agreeable fictions. A comedy, a "portrait," and a few verses by Ninon also exist. We have several anecdotes which prove her wit, such as the famous "Ah! le bon billet qu'a La Chastre"; which became a proverbial expression. Her integrity in money matters is expressed in the (possibly authentic) anecdote of the casket committed to her care and found intact after many years. But the greatest proof of her attractions, intellectual and other, is the multitude of her distinguished friends, who included all, or nearly all, those eminent in literature

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and society. A woman who was the intellectual companion—not mistress—of Molière, Boileau and Saint-Evremont, to name only three, must have possessed more than ordinary accomplishments and a remarkable personality.

Ninon was the child of a not too well assorted marriage. Her mother was a conventional-minded bigot ; her father, a handsome cavalry officer, was a gay libertine, with a love of literature and a passion for music. After Ninon was born he fell deeply in love with another woman, which passion eventually resulted in his ruin ; but he delighted in his quick-witted, charming little daughter and took some pains with her education. Plainly there was a duel between father and mother to decide which of them should influence this budding mind. Henri de Lanclos must have been a pleasant person, for he obliterated the influence of the pious mother and made Ninon a child after his own heart. He subtly inspired her with his passion for music and made her an able performer ; he communicated the precious gift of a love for literature ; and he indoctrinated her with the Epicurean, or rather Aristippean, ideas of the French Renaissance. Finally, he left her the significant bequest of his own copy of Montaigne. Thus Ninon learned to think, to perceive, and to enjoy. Mme de Lanclos tried hard to make her pious ; but the youthful *libertine* could not accept Christianity

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and was far too honest to feign, like most of the people she saw at church. Mme de Lanclos also tried to marry her ; but Ninon became the mistress of first one and then another young man, whom she immediately discarded when she discovered their feebleness and shortcomings.

Mme de Lanclos died ; M. de Lanclos was lost in exile ; the family was ruined. Ninon, for a time, entered a convent, but soon found she was not made for celibacy and the ascetic life. But her position was desperate, for there was little hope of marriage for a girl without money or prospects. Like Françoise d'Aubigné, afterwards her friend, she had to face this bitter fact that all her beauty and charm and intellect were nothing without money and family position. Françoise, as we all know, was lucky ; married a cripple for his protection and intrigued her way into the Royal bed. Ninon, more frank, more impetuous, less calculating, threw off all pretence and became openly a *femme entretenue*. But she did it in the grand style. How the mere paying lover was made to feel his inferiority, how often he was snubbed, how often boldly deceived with the object of a *caprice*, how often coolly refused the favours he imagined he had purchased ! Too often the *caprices* were unsatisfactory and Ninon found compensation in her genius for friendship. Saint-Evremond carried on the work begun by Henri de Lanclos ; under

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his guidance Ninon read Montaigne and developed from an Epicurean into a sceptic, and a sceptic with an enthusiasm for proselytizing. That is, perhaps, the chief reason for the opposition of the devout to Ninon ; for Anne of Austria was twice persuaded to imprison her. A mere courtesan could be endured, but not a charming and tactfully imperious lady, whose drawing-room was a centre for free-thought as well as for gallantry and fine manners.

Ninon's *caprices* were mostly briefer than woman's love is apt to be (according to Hamlet), but she possessed the art of making lifelong friends out of the lovers of a few weeks. There was one real passion in her life, that for Villarceaux, whom she loved passionately, and by whom she had a son, afterwards a captain in the navy. But the charm even of Villarceaux gradually waned, and she returned from a country retirement to the pleasures of her *salon* and polite conversation. The stories of her prolonged youth are false ; she had no lover after she was fifty, but lived on her savings as the arbitress of manners and "philosophic thought." Once she tried to enter a convent again, but the Bishop made love to her, and she revolted from this hypocrisy. In her old age she became a student of Seneca, and her Stoicism inclined towards religion ; Saint-Evre-mont, from his English exile, had more than once to call her to order. Voltaire, who saw her as a

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boy of twelve, ungraciously talks of her as a hideous hag. Nevertheless, she retained her almost fabulous prestige until her death in extreme old age. She was born in November 1620, and died on October 17, 1705, aged 84. Her great friend, Mme de Maintenon, whom she had befriended in adversity and avoided in prosperity, outlived her ten years. Ninon de Lanclos died in peace with the Church, having lived some seventy years at war with it; this ultimate reconciliation was necessary in order to obtain decent burial. Voltaire went through the same ceremony, for the same reasons. Her epitaph had been composed by La Bruyère, when he said :

Une belle femme qui a les qualités d'un honnête homme est ce qu'il y a au monde de plus délicieux. L'on trouve en elle tout le mérite des deux sexes.

"Ninon de Lanclos, Portraits et Documents Inédits."  
Par Emile Magne. (Paris : Emile-Paul Frères.)

### XIII

#### PAUL SCARRON

**T**HERE are several authors whose lives seem to have been designed beforehand by their own Muses. Paul Scarron is one of the most striking and pitiable examples of these freaks of destiny. His life was a burlesque ; no writer of realistic fiction would dare to invent the circumstances of Scarron's life with its interwoven texture of things base and sublime, ridiculous and pathetic. He was self-indulgent, but he had moral courage to an extraordinary degree ; he was a satirist and a cynic, yet he was as nobly charitable as Johnson himself ; he suffered almost intolerable vexations and misfortunes, yet was the gayest talker of his age ; when he was nailed to his chair, a helpless cripple, at a period when cripples were treated with brutality and loathing, his wit and charm brought all Paris to his house. When physical suffering had made movement intolerable, he left his invalid's chair for two persons only—the Queen and Ninon de Lanclos. Supreme suffering of all—he was married to one of the most charm-

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ing women of the seventeenth century, Françoise d'Aubigné, afterwards Madame de Maintenon, and she was never his wife save in name. Supreme irony of all—the widow of Scarron, that scapegrace, that atheist, that vagabond of genius, became the wife of the *Roi Soleil*; saved from the cloister by the charity of a sceptic, she became the avenging fury of orthodoxy, and the crippled poet's nurse was called "Majesté" in the private apartments of Versailles. Scarron composed "Le Roman Comique" from a few episodes and memories of his youth; but as we now see it his true "Roman Comique," with all its bitter irony, was his life.

Scarron's father was a quaint creature, no doubt very irritating to his family. He was one of a long line of wealthy lawyers and Judges, but his personal character was curious. He was wordy and eccentric on the bench; he meddled with literature and dreamed of re-establishing the reputation of Ronsard against Malherbe; he was a frenzied bigot who carried the Epistles of Saint Paul with him wherever he went, and so bored his friends with tedious commentaries that the Prince de Condé gave him the nickname of "the Apostle." His first wife was a poor Breton girl of good family, Gabrielle Goguet, by whom he had eight children, including Paul, the author, who was born on July 4, 1610. She died in 1613, and some years later old Scarron gave his

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children a stepmother, a real traditional stepmother, who laid the foundations of the poet's subsequent miseries by a life-long intrigue against the children of the first wife. She particularly disliked young Paul, who saw through her and was sharp enough to expose some of her ignoble practices of greed and avarice. But her influence over the father was too great, and she succeeded in sending Paul away to school at Charleville for a couple of years. When he came back there was the usual French family council, which sat to determine the youth's future. Madame Scarron's avarice—anxious to get rid of the first wife's children as cheaply as possible—triumphed, and the fantastic project was formed of placing in the Church one of the least churchly persons who ever existed. At the age of nineteen Paul Scarron took the first step and accepted the *petit collet*.

It was an age of atheistical abbés, when the least important factor in entering the Church was vocation, when a cathedral chapter refused to accept one of their number as bishop merely on the ground that it was not certain he was a Christian. Having gratified the family caprice by accepting a Church career, Scarron proceeded to abuse the occasion by an excessive indulgence in secular amusements. He dressed as finely as an abbé dared, and his amours were frequent and varied; he became a friend of another Abbé Paul, afterwards Cardinal de Retz, whose

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acquaintance he made in the edifying company of Marion de l'Orme. Scarron rhymed and sighed—the latter with more success than the former—haunted the theatres, fluttered round the actresses, lost six months' income in an evening at play, developed his wits and his gluttony at the celebrated tavern orgies of poets. Scarron *père* tolerated these *dérèglements* for the most fantastic of motives that ever dwelt in the bosom of a grave magistrate; his son was a poet and therefore was entitled to all the license of the Pléïade. But the implacable step-mother was still intriguing. It was necessary to push young Paul a step further, to get the tonsure irrevocably fixed on his head, to have him sent away from Paris, so that the policy of taking the family money for the other children might be more rapidly continued. In 1633 the Bishop of Mans agreed to accept Paul Scarron as a sort of secretary and promised to make him a canon at the next vacancy; this occurred in 1636, but immediately Scarron became involved in a law-suit with the nephew of the last canon and drew no revenue from his canonry until 1639. Meanwhile, in 1635, he had made the journey to Rome as part of the suite which accompanied Alphonse de Richelieu on his mission to the Pope. Traces of the impression left by this expedition will be found in "Le Roman Comique," but the chief framework of that amusing book is the

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life of Mans and the strolling players who visited it. The famous Ragotin is a caricature of some ecclesiastic of Mans whom Scarron disliked, and many of the other characters, such as La Bouvillon and La Rapinière, are modelled on inhabitants of Mans. Those who wish to follow up this interesting topic should read Henri Chardon's "La Troupe du Roman Comique Dévoilée."

Life at Mans was not so tedious as Scarron had apprehended. There were a few interesting households in the district, and the visits of great courtiers who owned estates in Maine, to provide society and flirtations for the *abbé pimpant*; there were the troupes of players and poets, such as Rotrou and Mairet, whom Scarron had befriended; there was the succulent cheer for which Mans was renowned, and the Carnival. Alas for our abbé, the Carnival proved a fatal temptation. Legend has it that he daubed his naked body with honey and then rolled in feathers to create a new and sensational costume; in the streets handfuls of feathers were plucked from him, and the scandalized population chased the unfortunate naked canon through the town to the bridge, where he leaped the parapet, scrambled out of the river, and hid in the reeds until sunset. The shock and exposure brought on a violent fever (perhaps rheumatic fever) from which he nearly died, and only recovered to find himself a permanent

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invalid without the use of his limbs. Two visits to a watering-place gravely compromised his fortune without bringing any permanent relief. The days of the *abbé pimpant* were over; those of the witty *cul-de-jatte* were beginning. Meanwhile, our poet's father, "the Apostle," had involved himself in trouble by the unwise action of opposing some illegal edict of Richelieu; he soon justified his nickname by enduring persecution in the shape of exile and the loss of his office, which was worth 100,000 livres. Scarron wrote a poem addressed to Richelieu on his father's behalf; Richelieu was amused, but died before he did anything for "the Apostle." Things went so wrong with Scarron and with everyone he tried to help or who tried to help him that he became convinced he was a *porteguignon*, a Jonah. Constant money troubles afflicted the *cul-de-jatte*; he lost much of his canon's revenue through absence; his father died and he became involved in another tremendous law-suit, this time with his perfidious stepmother.

Probably the hope of squeezing a few pistoles from the book-sellers led him to publish a first collection of burlesque poems in 1644, which was highly praised by Guez de Balzac and the peripatetic gossips who were the reviewers of that age. But the praise was desperately slow in transforming itself into pistoles. Scarron begged shamelessly from



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Mazarin, was refused and wrote his *Mazarinade*. The Queen had previously allotted him a reasonably good pension, but Scarron was one of those people who spend twice their income, whatever it may be. He worked for the theatre and produced comedies which were very successful and were praised by Molière. Then came the Fronde. Scarron adopted "a plague on both your houses" attitude and lamented the high price of melons. In the midst of these financial struggles the little *cul-de-jatte* gave a proof of noble compassion. A former mistress, named Céleste, had thrown him over years before for a nobleman who eventually gave her 40,000 livres to enter a comfortable convent. The convent went bankrupt and poor Sœur Céleste was starving when Scarron took her in and provided for her. But providence did not recompense this charity; instead it dispatched de Retz, then *coadjuteur* of Paris, and the diabolical spirit of the Fronde, to persuade Scarron to publish his poem against Mazarin. It appeared in 1651 and annoyed Mazarin deeply; but the Fronde collapsed, and it was a poor title to Mazarin's aid to have written one of the most popular anti-Mazarin pieces and to have supplied the style in which innumerable vituperative "Mazarinades" were written. On the Cardinal's return, Scarron even thought it wise to retire to the country. De Retz showed his usual ingratitude. Though he

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had compromised Scarron, he did absolutely nothing for him when the first part of "Le Roman Comique" was published (in 1651) with a dedication to the *coadjuteur*.

Scarron's next follies were emigration to America and marriage. Seduced by stories of the earthly paradise and El Dorado in the West, he actually dreamed of accompanying a party of colonists to America and of ruling them from his cripple's chair. Luckily for him he did not join the expedition (it was a failure, with a sordid record of treacherous intrigue and indiscipline), but he lost 3,000 livres. His marriage was a nobler chimera. Françoise d'Aubigné was then a beautiful and penniless girl, living on the grudging charity of a Catholic aunt who had engineered her conversion. Having saved Françoise's soul this charitable lady now determined to save her keep. The usual ultimatum, marriage or a convent, was presented; but what hope of marriage for a girl without a penny of *dot*? Scarron came to the rescue in his generous, infidel way. He offered to give the girl enough money to enter a convent or, if she preferred, to marry her, since marriage with him (poor cripple) was a ceremony and nothing more. With that prudent eye of hers, the future Madame de Maintenon observed the situation and chose marriage. They were the most singular and ill-assorted couple imaginable. Françoise d'Aubigné

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was then beautiful and in the flower of her youth ; Scarron was a miserable wreck. She was an ardent convert, he a complete sceptic ; she was prudent, he improvident ; she was the supporter of all social convention, he the satirist with the sharpest tongue in Paris. Compare their portraits at this time : Françoise shows beautiful shoulders, a fine oval face, large untroubled eyes, an inexperienced mouth ; the Mans portrait of Scarron shows a face as characteristic and keen as Voltaire's, heavy sarcastic features, a bitter mouth with deep lines, the nose of a faun, and the eyes of a faun grown old and cynical—a man so hurt by life he could but laugh at it. This marriage took place in 1652 and lasted eight years ; Scarron died in October, 1660. His burlesque poetry, curiously like that of the corresponding school in England, is read only by a few enthusiasts ; his plays are still re-published ; but he is remembered by two dissimilar feats—his “ Roman Comique ” and his marriage.

“ Scarron et son Milieu.” Par Emile Magne. (Paris : Emile-Paul Frères.)

#### XIV

### RESTIF DE LA BRETONNE

FOR many years Restif, or Rétif, de la Bretonne was an outcast among authors. In his lifetime he was contemptuously called "the Rousseau of the gutter"; Sainte-Beuve described him and his works laconically as "mud." Undoubtedly many of the hundred and fifty volumes published by this prolific author deserve that energetic condemnation; but modern criticism, examining Restif's work more coolly, has discovered things of value in the "mud." The three volumes here reviewed (two of them have been in print for some years) are edited by distinguished French scholars and are of interest to all students of French literature for their remarkably vivid pictures of society and events in the eighteenth century. Restif was a plebeian and self-educated writer, and his works show the characteristic defects of that type of mind: but by careful selection they yield most interesting facts about the French lower classes before and during the Revolution. One part of Restif's work—with which we are not here

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concerned—is the result of an abnormal eroticism. The “*Vie de Mon Père*” is quite free from this fault, and is a kind of idyll of French family life in the country under the *ancien régime*, an over-coloured and over-emotional outburst of filial piety and “back to nature” sentiment which is really quite charming. The “*Nuits Révolutionnaires*” are equally unobnoxious and form a thrilling diary of the Revolution, from its outbreak to the fall of Robespierre, as seen from the viewpoint of a “man in the street.” The *Mercur de France* anthology is less innocent, but shows clearly Restif’s characteristic qualities and his amazing knowledge of the underworld of his time.

Restif has become a collector’s “item.” M. Boisson estimates that the richly bound complete collection of Restif’s works, which sold for 20,000 francs in 1875, would now be worth at least 120,000 francs. And Restif died in poverty surrounded by dusty packages of these then valueless works. But the literary critic is not concerned with those arbitrary values, even though they are significant of the change of opinion concerning the author. What is truly interesting is to look at Restif and his writings as indications of that strange fermentation of minds in the eighteenth century which at length exploded in so dire and savage a calamity. Restif was in no sense a creator, however humble, of the Revolution, though he predicted it accurately years before it

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occurred ; but he followed and reported with great precision the changing current of popular opinions. He was not a Jacobin, but the stuff from which the followers of Jacobinism were created. His mind was seething with ideas and projects, sometimes ridiculous, sometimes sensible and enlightened, often self-contradictory. He is the very type of the emotional thinker, the man of acute but plebeian sensibilities who makes them the ultimate standard of judgment. Like Rousseau, he was an egotist ; like Rousseau, he was a sophist. But he was not a misanthrope ; on the contrary, his impulsive sensibility, his lack of reserve, his curiosity brought him into intimate contact with a thousand strange episodes of human life. He romanticized much of the material he gathered ; he saw life too often from the bias of his own temperament, distorted by the ideas of the moment. But it happens that his temperament and his ideas were of just that sort which made the Revolution possible. No social historian of the eighteenth century can neglect Restif de la Bretonne.

“*La Vie de Mon Père*” appeared in 1779, when Restif was forty-five. It is the book of a man whose undeniable virtues—industry, honesty, compassion, charity—could not save him from the consequences of undisciplined passions. In one sense it was an enormous achievement for the son of a peasant to become a fairly successful author, sought out by

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members of the upper classes ; but, in another sense, Restif saw that his life was a failure. Looking back on the surroundings of his childhood, and, of course, seeing them ideally perfect, he felt that he had lost tranquillity and self-respect in the city. His book is an ardent panegyric of the simple morals of that patriarchal village life which existed down to the period of the railways. Those who recollect Southey's description of the North Country yeoman in "The Doctor" will have some idea of the kind of life Restif describes in "*La Vie de Mon Père*." Unfortunately, either owing to his own temperament or to the influence of Rousseau, Restif spoiled what might have been a masterpiece by a gushing sensibility which sounds false and by over-heightening the virtues of his father and mother. It is certain that Restif's respect for his father was very great. His wife has recorded that if an old man begged of him, Restif, unless absolutely penniless, would take him to a tavern and buy him a meal, from respect for his father's memory. Much may be granted to filial piety, but one feels that Restif is obliquely satirizing the life of towns by overpraising the life of the country. He is too prodigal of tears ; his peasants are always virtuously weeping and apostrophizing Heaven, virtue, or a "respectable ami." But the description of the family at night in the fourth book of "*La Vie de Mon Père*" rings true and is worthy

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of a great writer. The whole picture is delightful—the day's work ended, the yeoman's family sitting down to their frugal evening meal with all the servants ranged in a kind of hierarchy but with no differences in the food ; the stories told by the firelight or the chapters of Genesis read with delight by the old yeoman who found the image of his own life in that of the patriarchs :

. . . puis on s'allait coucher en silence ; car après la prière du soir, les rires et la conversation à voix haute étaient sévèrement interdits,

Memories of this life must have been in singular contrast with Restif's life in Paris. Born in 1734, he had been intended for agriculture, but his father was persuaded to educate him. An *abbé*, who was his half-brother, gave him lessons, and he was apprenticed to a printer at Auxerre. At an incredibly early age he gave signs of that extreme sexuality which ruined his life. In 1755 he obtained a post at the Imprimerie Royale and worked with heroic industry, but, alas ! “il prend en même temps les habitudes de la plus dégradante débauche.” He was twice married. His first book was published in 1767, and others were rapidly produced with incredible industry. From his early training he retained the virtues of frugality and industry ; even when he was famous he lived in a small room, working by the light of a candle at night. In just over twenty

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years he saved 60,000 livres from the profits of his books and, to his intense indignation, lost the fruits of all this self-denial in the depreciation of the *assignats* during the Revolution. He was a *noctambule*, wandering about the streets at night, wrapped in a large cloak ; he especially liked the île de Saint-Louis, where he carved dates on the parapets and walls of houses. During the Revolution he wandered about perplexed and frightened, oscillating between Royalism and Jacobinism, writing his observations and setting them up in type with his own hands. He was so well-known a figure that whenever he was arrested by the patrols of *Sans-culottes* he had only to name one of his books to be immediately released. The loss of his savings reduced him to misery ; he eked out an existence on an annual pension of 2,000 livres received for some post in the Customs, and died in poverty in 1806.

The "Nuits Révolutionnaires" form a record of Restif's experiences and the information he picked up in his nightly wanderings during the years from 1789 to 1793. It is not easy to define his opinions, because they varied with the course of events. He had little sympathy with the upper classes, but he respected the King. He was obviously revolted by the violence and brutality of the mob at the beginning of the Revolution ; but either from fear of the guillotine or because he shared the general exaltation

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of people's minds, he became more of a Jacobin as events proceeded. Finally, he avows himself a strong partisan of Marat and Robespierre and the Terror. He applauds in 1793 the September Massacres which had obviously horrified him at the time ; at the same time he acquiesces in the executions of the King and Queen, of the Girondins and of the priests. He had worked out the plan of a sort of ideal Communism, and tried to get himself elected as a deputy in order to impose it on the nation. Communism naturally led him to support tyranny. Quotations from Restif's miscellaneous writings, gathered by M. Funck-Brentano, show admirably how he followed the general trend of opinion. Under Louis XVI he was all for the King, in 1789 for the Constituent Assembly, in 1792 he was a Jacobin, in 1794 a Terrorist, and in 1797 he wrote :

Représentants de la Nation et vous, braves Directeurs, de l'énergie ! C'est le courage seul qui peut nous sauver tous. N'épargnez pas l'ennemi ! enlevez tout, pour faire marcher votre gouvernement—et c'est ce qu'a fait le héros Buonaparte —qu'il soit ferme (votre gouvernement) absolu, *militaire*, pendant toute la guerre et quelque temps après.

The reference to Napoleon is significant. Restif's Revolutionary writings show admirably how an honest man of real sensibility could argue himself into supporting the Terror and how the same terrorist could evolve into a loyal subject of the Empire. It is a most instructive revelation, and a corroborative

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footnote to Sorel's "Europe et la Révolution Française." Of the interest and vividness of Restif's diary of the Revolution there can be no doubt. His curiosity, his habits of night wandering, his varied acquaintance brought him in touch with many characteristic events of that singular epoch. A passage from the "Nuits Révolutionnaires" will show the first-hand interest of the work better than any description :

Je sors vers les trois heures et demie, la tête encore embarrassée, et je m'avance, comme un homme ivre, du côté du pont Notre-Dame. Le grand jour, occasionné par le dégagement, commençait à m'éveiller ; je respirais librement, lorsque j'aperçois devant moi une foule tumultueuse. . . . Je m'avance, et—ô spectacle d'horreur !—ce sont deux têtes que je vois au bout d'une pique ! Effrayé, je m'informe :

"C'est," me dit un boucher, "les têtes de Flesselles et de Launey." A ces mots, je frissonne. Je vois un nuage de maux s'élever sur la capitale infortunée des Français. . . .

Je m'avance ; mille voix servent d'organe à la renommée :

"La Bastille est prise !"

Je n'en crus rien et j'avançai pour en aller voir le siège.

Au milieu de la grève je trouve un corps tronqué de sa tête, étendu au milieu du ruisseau, et qu'environnaient cinq ou six indifférents. Je questionne.

"C'est le gouverneur de la Bastille."

J'avançai, sans m'informer davantage : mon âme éprouvait trop de sensations."

"La Vie de Mon Père." Par Restif de la Bretonne. Introduction de Marius Boisson. (Paris : Bossard.)

"Les Nuits Révolutionnaires." Par Restif de la Bretonne. Introduction de F. Funck-Brentano. (Paris : Fayard.)

"Rétif de la Bretonne." Les plus Belles Pages. (Paris : Mercure de France.)

## XV

### THE YOUTH OF M. DE FLORIAN

THE first misfortune in writing an article on Florian is that one comes after—a long way after—Anatole France; the second is that nobody reads Florian now. Not even the persuasive eloquence of M. France can convince us that “Estelle” is a good story. It is what the French call a *bergerie* and bears the same relation to the agricultural life that a Sèvres figurine does to a hard-working dairy-maid. “Estelle” is filled with fine impossibilities; it is an Arcadia of Virtue with a capital V.

O grandeur, que tu es belle quand la vertu te rend utile !  
Que le spectacle de l'homme puissant occupé de secourir ses frères, est doux pour une âme sensible !

That is the tone of “Estelle.” We meet with many of the stock figures of “Romance”—despairing and superlatively faithful lovers, stern fathers, philosophical hermits, and a deal of piping to flocks. Sainte-Beuve said one ought to read “Estelle” at fourteen and a half; fifteen was too mature an age. That is a little cruel, but unfortunately rather near the



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truth. And yet there is a sort of charm even in these faded, slightly ridiculous romances of extreme sentiment ; in " Galatée," which contains some rather horrible prose of a pink and white stucco kind, there occurs this " back to nature " declamation :

Quand pourrai-je vivre au village ? Quand serai-je le possesseur d'une petite maison entourée de cerisiers ? Tout auprès, seraient un jardin, un verger, une prairie et des ruches : un ruisseau bordé de noisetiers environnerait mon empire ; et mes désirs ne passeraient jamais ce ruisseau. Là, je coulerais des jours heureux ; le travail, la promenade, la lecture occuperaient tous mes moments.

It is the same feeling as that in Mr. Yeats's " lake-water lapping " ; but, as someone pointed out, for so ardent a lover of the country M. de Florian had a furious attachment to Paris. He was, indeed, one of those apparently inconsistent characters, so frequent in the second half of the eighteenth century, who, in a time of confusion and transition, are pulled this way and that by the conflicting forces of their age. M. de Florian praised rustic simplicity and country solitudes in his romances, but he was seldom happy away from the society of the Duc de Penthièvre or Mme de la Briche ; he was an energetic defender of " virtue," and yet . . . ; he was always talking about disinterested sentiments in love, but it was observed that his ardour cooled as the *dot* of his *fiancée* became less ; finally, he wanted and worked

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for the "rights of man," and was very much upset indeed by the Revolution. At bottom he was a gentle egotist, and not lacking in that sound prudence in his own affairs so characteristic of this sort of sentimentalist.

The Florian revealed to us by M. Bouis in this reprint is a far more sprightly and amusing figure than the Florian of the shepherd's pipe. The "*Mémoires d'un Jeune Espagnol*" are really Florian's own memoirs of his childhood and early youth. No doubt he meant to continue them, and his early death frustrated the project. It is to be wished that Florian had written more memoirs and fewer "*Estelles*" and "*Fables*." The *mièvrerie* of his style disappears, and he writes in the frank, witty tone usual in eighteenth-century memoirs. The book is only a fragment, but it gives an extraordinarily lively picture of a penniless young man of good family in those far-off, cheerful days.

Florian's father was the eighth son of a gentleman who spent all his money on builders and women. The heavily indebted estate of Florian itself was all that remained, and here our young gentleman was brought up in his childhood. He was a thorough Frenchman; before he was ten he had kissed his little cousin Séraphine and had filled himself with martial ardour by reading a translation of the *Iliad*. Florian was related distantly to Voltaire, and

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perhaps the most attractive part of his memoirs is that dealing with his visit to the sage of Ferney, "ce grand génie" as Florian naturally calls him, giving Voltaire the name of Lope de Vega to keep up the Spanish illusion. It appears that Don Lope de Voltaire was very much taken with his youthful relative. At supper he was placed next to Voltaire, who amused himself with the child and neglected his guests. The first thing Voltaire asked him was if he knew a great deal; "Oui, monsieur, je sais l'Iliade et le blason." Voltaire laughed and told him the fable of the merchant, the shepherd, and the king's son, which made Florian a democrat on the spot. But Don Lope gave still more unqualified signs of his approval and large tolerance. Florian, still full of the Iliad, decided that a large bed of poppies at Ferney were all Trojans and that he was Achilles; after nearly half an hour's massacre performed with a wooden sword, Voltaire intervened and begged the life of Hector, the tallest poppy. It was at Ferney, too, that Florian made a sort of *début* in the world of arts and beauty. Mlle Clairon, the beautiful and charming actress, was staying with Voltaire; in accordance with the agreeable eighteenth-century custom a little "fête" was organized in her honour, with *couplets galants*, written by Voltaire himself, and sung by Florian and a little girl dressed (singular omen!) as a shepherd and shepherdess. This was

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accompanied by a "superbe robe de Perse" for Mlle Clairon, who "threw herself upon the neck of Lope de Vega and kissed me several times." Tokay was drunk to the lady's health, Voltaire made impromptu verses, and the company danced until dawn; which provides Florian with an opportunity to write a very pretty description of sunrise at Ferney. It is a charming picture of old Voltaire and one worth keeping in mind when others, less agreeable, present themselves. And it is a pleasant glimpse of the gaiety and simplicity of eighteenth-century life.

But even in the eighteenth century such fêtes could not last for ever; young Florian had to go back to tutors and Latin grammar, and, what must have been worse, he had to learn the "Henriade" by heart and was rewarded with ten sous for each book he recited from memory. At thirteen he became page to the Duc de Penthièvre, that "grand seigneur philosophe," who was a kind of embodiment of eighteenth-century philanthropy and generous illusions. The duke's pages spent their time walking in the park at Versailles, exchanging punches and pulling each other's hair; they also consumed much liquor at cafés, which made Florian seriously ill. Since the pages were ill-treated by their overseer and never received the various lessons which had been paid for on their behalf, one can only feel a mediocre admiration for the duke's training of young

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aristocrats. Fortunately for Florian, his precocious wit attracted the duke's attention; the duke nicknamed him "Polichinelle," and our prudent young man was careful to cultivate a friendship so likely to be useful to a poor man of letters.

Florian begins the second book of his memoirs with these words :

J'entre dans une nouvelle carrière, je quitte l'enfance et l'esclavage ; j'ai seize ans, un uniforme et ma liberté. Je vais décrire mes erreurs et mes folies ; trop heureux si, au moment où je les écris, il ne me reste plus à faire.

His "folies" were a series of trivial love affairs, which barely interested his heart at all, which he forgot as soon as some interesting distraction came along. He had not yet acquired his sage prudence :

Enchanté de mon nouvel état, je regrettais peu tout ce que je quittais ; j'étais fort vif, fort pétulant, fort avide de tout ce que je ne connaissais pas, et désirant avec fureur me singulariser dans quelque genre que ce fut.

And we lose him suddenly at eighteen, setting out for his regiment as a full-blown second lieutenant ; for the memoirs break off abruptly.

The later and more literary part of Florian's life is represented by the letters to Mme de la Briche and Boissy d'Anglas. Here we find a Florian more in accord with his "*légende*" ; a very literary Florian busied with proofs and dedications and quarrels with

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booksellers and candidature to the Academy ; a very prudent Florian trying his best to dodge the hydra of the Revolution. However, as is generally known, the hydra caught him ; he was imprisoned for a time, but released owing to the influence of Boissy d'Anglas. The shock and hardship were too much for a delicate man, already undermined by consumption ; he lived only six weeks after leaving his revolutionary prison, and died in 1794.

Poor Florian ! Posterity has not been too indulgent to him and his shepherdesses ; even M. France tells against him the unkind story of Rivarol. Rivarol met Florian one day with some papers sticking out of his pocket. " Ah, sir," said Rivarol, " how you would be robbed if people did not know you ! " He lived into a time when sharper wits and more forceful characters than his were needed ; perhaps Providence, who created him to live in a Watteau *fête champêtre*, was merciful in removing him so soon from this earth, for what could he have done in the ranks of the Grande Armée ?

" Mémoires d'un Jeune Espagnol, suivis des Lettres à Madame de la Briche et à Boissy d'Anglas." Introduction d'André Bouis. (Paris : Bossard.)

## XVI

### MÉRIMÉE'S YOUTH

MÉRIMÉE was a contemporary of the great romantic writers and was intimately concerned with the French romantic revival; but the most superficial observer can see that Mérimée's romanticism is peculiar to himself and tends to approach the realism of Flaubert. Of course "Columba" and "Carmen" (especially in Bizet's version, which one knows better than Mérimée's) are romantic; but even in them there are tendencies and qualities quite opposite to what might be called gross romanticism. How and why does Mérimée's romanticism differ from that of his contemporaries are questions which might lead to some interesting remarks on affinities of minds and the development of taste. The view of romanticism as a "spontaneous outburst" in 1830 owing to the removal of the despotism (!) of Charles X is as *naïf* and *simpliste* as the vision of a world peopled by Liberal-Rationalist heroes and Conservative-Church villains. It is, in fact, the interpretation, or rather distortion, of an intel-

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lectual and spiritual, above all, artistic, movement for the benefit of some rather petty, or at any rate superannuated, political and philosophical party. There might be various interpretations of romanticism. It might, for example, be looked at as the last protest, the last flash of genius of European art-civilization before we settled into the barbarism of the commercial era and agreed to substitute motoring for art and golf for Greek. But whatever propaganda we try to draw from the romantic movement, we can no longer ignore the fact that it was a slow development which began at least as early as the reign of Louis XV. The *Mémoires* of Bachaumont are very instructive in this respect.

Among the major sources of romanticism is the work of Rousseau, and from him comes that subtle, delicious *maladie de l'âme* which consists in substituting for this very dreary world the artist's dream of what the world might be. The great art pupil of Rousseau was Chateaubriand, who attempted to use the seductions of romance for the benefit of the monarchy and the Church—without believing wholly in either of them, by the way. But what a seduction of all one's sensibilities lurks in the melancholy eloquence of Chateaubriand! In comparison, Hugo is but a clumsy imitator, with his gross antitheses and base flattery of the mob. That Rousseauesque or Chateaubriandesque sensibility was shared by

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practically all the fine minds of the early nineteenth century. One has only to read Mérimée's notes on Spain to see that he was as much infected by it as Musset or Delacroix. Unfortunately for many of the Romantics, they were unable to accept the misanthropy and cynicism of Rousseau or the Christianity of Chateaubriand. A third seducer existed, a master of wit and scepticism, a defender of the benefits of common sense, good living and no Popery, but an artist to the tips of his fingers; is it necessary to name Voltaire? Whoever essays to know the eighteenth century can no more escape the seduction of Voltaire than the charm of Rousseau. And Mérimée was far too close to the eighteenth century to escape either.

The problem, then, of Mérimée and other young "romantics" of the same complexity of mind was how to reconcile and harmonize the moral sensibility of Rousseau, the æsthetic sensibility of Chateaubriand, and the mocking scepticism of Voltaire. It was as horrible a problem as if your mind were a sort of Manx wheel with each of the three legs bolting in different directions. No wonder the Romantic's eye was haggard and his hair disordered. Those who can cast off the prejudices of their age and read the three great French authors as if they were contemporaries can best appreciate these difficulties; for the remarkable thing is that each is

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irresistible. Get well into "La Nouvelle Héloïse" and you will feel certain that your destiny is to make some good woman unhappy; involve yourself in Chateaubriand's "Itinéraire" and "Voyages" and you will find yourself irresistibly carried to the Continental boat train with the bitter regret that it is not a stage coach; soak your mind for a few days in "Candide" and the "Dictionnaire Philosophique" and you will find yourself wearing an ironic smile, talking in brilliant epigrams and regarding with sarcastic intolerance the innocent and unsuspecting vicar who has dropped in for tea and a game of tennis. So it was with the youthful Mérimée. Somehow or other he had to reconcile these disparate but overwhelming influences; he found the solution, as others did, in Lord Byron and in Beyle.

No doubt it is from modesty and not from lack of understanding that so many English critics depreciate Lord Byron. His influence on the romantic movement in Europe can hardly be over-estimated. Hugo and Vigny, Musset and Lamartine are all "Byroniens." For the youthful Mérimée, Byron was a sort of god, as, indeed, he was for half the youth of Europe. In Byron was to be found that synthesis of moral and æsthetic sensibility and scepticism which was so ardently desired. Childe Harold's "Pilgrimage," the romantic tales from "Lara" to "The Corsair," "Cain" and "Manfred," above all,

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"Don Juan," gave the French generation of 1820-40 exactly what it wanted—gallantry, sensibility, scepticism, melancholy, exotic romance, aristocratic disdain, brusque interludes of action, the persecution of the respectable and a useless death, what more could be wanted? To feel the magic of Byron in full one must again throw aside the prejudices of another age and see him as the awe-struck British midddy saw him "dead-drunk, but with the face of an angel." Young Mérimée was entirely seduced by this magic. He was too intelligent to follow in the wake of those youths who were then infesting Venice with their black cloaks, melancholy and *amours*. But the imprint of Byron was never wholly effaced, if only because of Mérimée's dandyism and attachment to Spain. Is it not characteristic that Mérimée supported the Second Empire, not from any political conviction, but on account of the *beaux yeux* of Eugénie de Montijo? When Mérimée criticizes Byron, it is in the spirit of one attempting to throw off a domination.

The son of good *bourgeois* like the Mérimées could not exactly rival the English peer on his own ground. What was needed as a corrective and a re-adjustment was supplied by Beyle. Mérimée met Beyle while he was still a very young man, and, though his natural genius and pride kept him from becoming in any abject sense a disciple of Beyle, Mérimée very

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definitely embodies that shade of French romanticism which admired Beyle and proceeded from him. The temperament of Beyle has been analysed time and time again; indeed, M. Trahard protests that too much attention is given to Beyle and too little to Mérimée. What is so attractive in Beyle is that he embodies those qualities of the eighteenth century to which people turned as a refuge from the floods of romanticism and the vulgarity of the naturalistes. The religion of Chateaubriand, the humanitarianism of Hugo were equally repulsive to him. He was essentially a Voltairean sceptic, but he was also an enthusiastic dilettante (one thinks of the Comte de Caylus), and at times a would-be imitator of Laclos's Valmont. Beyle admired what the modern world of commerce lacks (and lacked even in his time); that is, strong, passionate, sensitive characters. These he found in the Renaissance and in Milanese society. Beyle's "liberalism," therefore, was the very opposite of our cautious, mediocre, materialist, safety-loving, humanitarian, monotonous democracy. Beyle admired Napoleon because he was a great character and a stimulator of character; he detested the Restauration because it stifled character under decorum and hypocrisy. The fascination of Beyle for the high-spirited, sensitive Mérimée is perfectly comprehensible. A scorn for everything petty and commercial, a passion for



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painting and music, the *beau idéal*, *l'amour passion*, and at the same time a keen intelligence and a profound scepticism; these made, and still make, the charm and attraction of Beyle. Mérimée, though so much younger, frequented him assiduously, was regularly present at Delécluze's evenings, and corresponded with Beyle on terms of intimacy. One might even detect the influence of Beyle in the rather puerile pseudonyms under which Mérimée published his earliest works, the plays supposed to be by a Spanish actress, the poems "translated" from a non-existent poet of Illyria.

From all this we may get some idea of the complicated state of mind of the youthful Mérimée when, in July 1830, he set out suddenly for Spain. Mérimée had passed through a love disappointment at a time when such things were taken seriously; his friend Sautélet committed suicide on May 13, 1830, as the result of a similar disappointment. From all such extravagant applications of the romantic mood Mérimée was saved by his Voltairean scepticism. He set out for Spain, then, in a mood of proper melancholy as to the sentiments, but wide awake intellectually. This six months' stay in Spain is, perhaps, decisive in Mérimée's life as an artist. True, he had been writing hard before he left; but not only did he find in Spain the material for works as famous as "Carmen," he seemed to find his own maturity.



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It was on this trip that he met Mme de Montijo and played with the little girl who was afterwards Empress of the French. What could be more romantic? And yet it was immediately after this revelation of Spain with its romantic bull-fights and Carmens and all the rest of it that Mérimée began to draw away from the then triumphant Romantics; 1830 was the political triumph of romanticism, the beginning of the era which was deafened by the advice of Victor Hugo. Faithful to the tradition of Byron and to the example of Beyle, Mérimée gradually withdrew from the cohort of Hugo; he could not accommodate his ideal of art to that gentleman's political ambitions. In other words, Mérimée's youth was then over and he began to appear as the mature independent mind we all know. Few sensitive personalities passed through the romantic crisis with less essential damage than Mérimée. He kept his integrity and sincerity jealously. Perhaps that is why so many contemporaries, who are suspicious and even contemptuous of the great Romantics, feel something closely approaching sympathy for Mérimée.

"La Jeunesse de Prosper Mérimée." (1803-1834). Par Pierre Trahard, Docteur és Lettres. Two Vols. (Paris: Champion.)

## XVII

### “CINQ-MARS”

THE critics, especially the French critics, have been very hard on Alfred de Vigny's historical novel. The book was published in 1826, and was generally highly praised by the critics, who included Lamartine, Nodier and Villemain. One enthusiast declared the book was “Walter Scott freed from the prolixity and unnecessary details imposed upon him by the spirit of his nation”! On the other hand, a young man named Sainte-Beuve chose to point out its defects in 1826, as he did in subsequent articles in 1827, 1835, and 1864. Victor Hugo thought it “one of the most remarkable books of the epoch.” But as France drew farther away from the aristocratic ideal, during the nineteenth century, opinion became more and more unfavourable. Lamartine considers it “a travesty of history”; Sainte-Beuve, “manqué en tant qu'historique”; M. Anatole France (whose book on Vigny is now unobtainable), thinks “Cinq-Mars” his “only mediocre book.” And—worst blow of all—Mr. Saintsbury does not like “Cinq-Mars,” and considers it inferior to Dumas.

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There is no unbending in “Cinq-Mars”; everybody is continually keyed up to the top note of his character. There is not a pleasant meal in the whole book; not that eating and drinking are important in themselves, but they are the natural circumstances of good fellowship. Vigny is still so far hypnotized by the *guindé*, false aristocratism of Louis XVIII as to be incapable of real good fellowship; devotion to a noble cause, instant readiness for self-sacrifice, scrupulous honour, chivalrous deference to women, loyalty, exact courtesy, these Vigny understands and expresses. But he lacks the warmheartedness and humanity of Sir Walter Scott, his almost Shakespearian pleasure in human nature; and he lacks also that exuberance and bustle which carry us so rapidly through a Dumas novel. “Cinq-Mars” is in one sense didactic; which again puts it in a class inferior to the Waverley Novels. It is cursed with that French incubus, a “thesis.” It had a political object: To show that the fall of the French Monarchy was due to the policy of Richelieu in crushing the great aristocratic families. And it had a social object: To put before the *Restauration* France a statement of the ideals of the old aristocratic France. Now, those ideals were noble and admirable, and translated differently might animate the best men of a democracy as well as of a monarchy; and the view of Richelieu, absurd as it is in some respects,

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has some truth in it. But by making his "thesis" too obvious, by over-stressing qualities and defects on either side, by too great an anxiety, Vigny missed writing a very fine book and laid himself open to that charge of creating "*le faux*" which was so strenuously urged against him.

The debt of "*Cinq-Mars*" to the Waverley Novels, particularly to "*Quentin Durward*," is obvious. When Sir Walter Scott was in Paris in 1826, Vigny called on him and presented him with an autographed copy of his novel, and, as M. Baldensperger points out, most of the early critics remarked on the derivation. The similarity to "*Quentin Durward*" is unmistakable. The ambition for love's sake of the two heroes, so central a motive in both stories, is remarkable; Marie de Gonzague has something in common with Isabelle de Croy; Vigny's Bassompierre is copied in part from Crawford; Scott's Tristan L'Hermite presages Laubardemont; Demors precedes de Thou. The study of Richelieu owes something to the famous portrait of Louis XI. But if we cease to ask for qualities it does not possess, we are rather dull if we find "*Cinq-Mars*" uninteresting. The trial scene, "*La Procès*," imitated by Hugo in "*Notre-Dame*," is a vivid piece of writing. The horrible and the emotions of martyrdom are well handled in the pages describing the burning of Urbain Grandier. The description of Richelieu's *levée* is at

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least as good as the similar description of Buckingham's *levée* in “Peveril of the Peak.” The “Romantic” scene between Cinq-Mars and Marie de Gonzague in the old Church of Saint-Eustache, with “l'éminence grise” hidden in the confessional-box in place of the Abbé Quillet, has the kind of “atmosphere” imitated a hundred times by later Romantics. There are better executions in English literature than that of “Cinq-Mars,” but the gesture of throwing away the hat (the signal for his rescue was to put on his hat) has just the right thrill and the right French flavour—*mon panache* ! And when it comes to vivid descriptions, “Cinq-Mars” reaches at times an extraordinarily high level of writing. Take, for example, the famous description of the storm in the Pyrenees :

Ils contemplèrent un spectacle étrange : l'orage était dans toute sa force, et c'était un orage des Pyrénées ; d'immenses éclairs partaient ensemble des quatre points de l'horizon, et leurs feux se succédaient si vite qu'on n'en voyait pas l'intervalle et qu'ils paraissaient immobiles et durables ; seulement la voûte flamboyante s'éteignait quelquefois tout à coup, puis reprenait ses lueurs constantes. Ce n'était plus la flamme qui semblait étrangère à cette nuit, c'était l'obscurité. L'on eût dit que, dans ce ciel naturellement lumineux, il se faisait des éclipses d'un moment : tant les éclairs étaient longs et tant leurs absences étaient rapides ! Les pics allongés et les rochers blanchis se détachaient sur ce fond rouge comme des blocs de marbre sur une coupole d'airain brûlant, et simulant au milieu des frimas les prodiges du volcan ; les eaux jaillissaient comme des flammes, les neiges s'écoulaient comme une lave éblouissante.



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Vigny writes in sentences, not in pistol-snaps five words long ; he can evoke emotion, call up a picture and build up harmonious cadences at once ; he can be languorous or energetic, sentimental or decisive as he desires. Compare, for example, the description of the crowd in "L'Emeute" with the sentimental meditation on clouds in "L'Absence" and the portrait of Louis XIII. They show gifts as a writer of prose which were hardly excelled until Flaubert set a new standard. "La Fête," though it sins here and there—particularly by the introduction of Corneille—is brilliant, and even the fainting of Marie de Gonzague when she hears of Cinq-Mars' death is well done. The weakest details in the book are the painfully ridiculous scene of a red-eyed Milton reading "Paradise Lost" to a set of French *précieuses* and *précieux* about sixteen years before he began to write it ; the death of Madeleine de Brou, aged nineteen, of emotion ; the death of Grandchamp, which occurs immediately after his master's execution ; and the not very successful imitation of Ophelia in the mad scene of Jeanne de Belfiel.

One's final view of "Cinq-Mars" is regretful, almost resentful. With so much excellent material, with such talents, with so many first-class scenes, with so dignified and felicitous a style, Vigny ought to have produced a masterpiece. And he has not done so—he fails in too many respects. Compare

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him with Hugo, and while one feels that Vigny is a gentleman and Hugo an ostentatious *bourgeois*, the genius of Hugo atones for his faults. But Vigny was a man of genius too ; probably he mistook his form. He was not a novelist by instinct, and the combination of poet, essayist, and aristocrat never yet made a novelist when the essential novelist's temperament was lacking. “Cinq-Mars” is a delightful book, but it is not a good novel ; it is bad history, but it is excellent Romantic prose.

“Cinq-Mars.” Par Alfred de Vigny. (Paris : Conard.)

## XVIII

### CHARACTERS AND PORTRAITS<sup>1</sup>

THE "Character" is a literary form which at first sight appears easily definable and limited to a comparatively few examples. Closer investigation shows that it is by no means easy to fix precise boundaries, and that examples are more numerous than is generally supposed, though not to the extent indicated by bibliographers who have been misled by the presence of the word "character" in the titles of books they have not read. There are differences important to notice between the Characters of Theophrastus, those of La Bruyère, and those of Hall, Earle, Overbury, Butler, and their numerous imitators. Without any wire-drawn distinctions it will be found that these Characters fall quite naturally into their several groups.

Theophrastus is "a botanist of minds," to use Sainte-Beuve's phrase. He defines a quality and shows it embodied in a man. He neglects those

<sup>1</sup> Part of this article was reprinted in the introduction to "A Book of Characters."

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niceties and contradictions of character which chiefly attract the modern writer, and concentrates upon the "ruling passion," the dominant quality. La Bruyère tends towards the portrait, the description of an individual disguised under a feigned name and elevated into the representative of a type by an able generalization. The English school uses the character sometimes for satirical purposes, sometimes for moral instruction, often as a pretext for conceits and decorative writing; it rarely describes individuals, though Butler does so. As a separate form the character was condemned to comparative sterility because of the small number of strongly marked human types, and it lost itself either in the "portraits" inserted in histories and memoirs, or in the periodical essay, or in comedy; but most of all in the novel. The psychological novel of modern times is in one sense a highly elaborate development of the Character of Theophrastus, La Bruyère, and Overbury: even its tendency to fine writing and verbal display is prefigured in the English character-writers. "By the Ilissus there was no Wragg," says Matthew Arnold in the famous disparagement of nineteenth-century England, developed by Oscar Wilde into an æsthetic panegyric of Athens. Wilde's tinted wax Athens would never be taken very seriously by anyone, but it is more dangerous that Arnold should have supported with his authority a Parnassian idealization

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of Athens, taking its finest achievements in the arts, in philosophy, and ethical conduct as its normal life. Perhaps the *Ἡθικοὶ χαρακτῆρες* were too much work of the second order for him to trouble about, but had he looked into them he would have found described a set of people quite as vulgar and commonplace as the espousers of deceased wives' sisters he found so disheartening. Even Athens of the fourth century had its boasters, its back-biters, its boors.

Rusticity it seems [says Theophrastus] is a grossness which is ignorant of good manners. The rustic is this sort of man. Before he goes to the Assembly he drinks a mixed wine and . . . [hiatus] maintains there is no perfume equal to thyme. His shoes are too large for his feet. He talks in a loud voice. He mistrusts relatives and friends, but confides his greatest secrets to slaves, and when he returns from the Assembly relates everything that has taken place to the hired labourers in his fields. Sitting down, he pulls his robe up above his knee and displays his nakedness. In the streets nothing strikes or surprises him, but if he meets an ox, an ass, or a goat, he stops to gaze at them. He takes his food from the pantry and drinks hard. He secretly makes love to the baking-woman, and then helps her to grind the flour for himself and his family. He eats his breakfast while he foddors his animals. He answers the door himself, accompanied by his dog, which he holds by the nose, exclaiming : "He is the guardian of house and land." When he is offered payment by a debtor he refuses the coin on the ground that it is worn and demands another. If he has lent his plough, a basket, a sack, the thought of them keeps him awake at night, and he gets up to ask for them back. When he is on his way to the town he asks the first passer-by the price of skins and salt fish and . . . [unintelligible line] : then he adds that as soon

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as he reaches the town he will have his hair cut, and, since it is on the way, will bring back some salt fish from Archias. He sings in the public baths. He hammers his shoes full of hob-nails.

The simplicity and calmly objective manner may seem insipid to those who prefer the revelations of tortured introspection. The character is delineated partly by what he wears, chiefly by what he does ; never by what he thinks, never by simile or by mere peculiarities. If his short robe and presence at the Assembly show the Athenian farmer, most of the traits are universal and apply now as well as two thousand years ago. None of the strokes which make up the outline are vague or irrelevant ; they hit upon those traits which are common to all " rusticity " and create a type which lives to-day. So far as we know, Theophrastus had no predecessors, and was therefore cultivating virgin soil ; but, however much his followers have refined upon his work by psychological subtleties and the observation of details, none, not even La Bruyère, has rivalled him in truth, universality, and classic sobriety of expression. There are thirty characters described by Theophrastus, and, though it would be rash to assert that they cover all the main types of folly and vice, they do express succinctly many permanent human characters. The modern exponent of *amoralism* and *roussetance* might be surprised to know his portrait

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was sketched some centuries B.C. under the title of the *φιλοπόνηρος*—the friend of the evil. The *φιλοπόνηρος* maintains that honesty is not in the order of nature, that one man is as good as another, that a rogue is merely a man without prejudices; he is the advocate of all doubtful causes and “the patron of the vilest foreigners.” To which some Byzantine scribe adds the sage reflection: “*Τὸ ὁμοιον πρὸς τὸ ὁμοιον πορεύεσθαι*”—birds of a feather.

There is a satirical and ethical intention in the Characters of Theophrastus, but it is not exaggerated; and he does not preach. He is a moralist who observes, without prejudice but without mercy, more impartial than the cynical La Rochefoucauld. Theophrastus was a Peripatetic and wrote on physics and botany; his is the most philosophic and scientific collection of Characters. The first printed edition of Theophrastus appeared in 1592 under the care of the learned Frenchman, Isaac Casaubon.<sup>1</sup> Casaubon's edition, with its learned commentary, introduced the character to England, where as a Protestant writer his work was received with great respect. The first noteworthy book of English characters is Bishop Hall's “Characters of Vices and Virtues” (1608), published two years before Casaubon came

<sup>1</sup> No! There were two earlier but partial editions: that of Venice in 1552, and of Nuremberg in 1527. This explains certain early imitations of “Characters” in England.



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to England and eighty years before La Bruyère's "Caractères."

Joseph Hall (1574-1656) is known to all the world by the bold, and quite untrue, assertion in the second couplet of his "Virgidemiarum":

I first adventure, follow me who list,  
And be the second English satirist.

He was a learned divine, attacked by Milton, and commended by Fuller as "our English Seneca." His "Characters of Vices and Virtues" were popular and frequently reprinted. They were versified by Tate. The scolding moralism which is the dominating quality of "Virgidemiarum" reappears in the Characters of Vices; the Virtues are eulogies of some moral quality embodied in a type—the good magistrate, the faithful man, the happy man. Hall modelled himself closely upon Theophrastus, with certain differences. His Characters are longer and more abstract; the scientific impartiality has gone, and in its place we have a Christian divine commending or reproving, not without point and wit, and sometimes with a burst of the stately prose of his epoch. Almost more important to the student watching the evolution of the *genre* is Hall's frequent use of antithesis and conceit, which opened the way for Earle and the rhetorical displays of Overbury. "Ambition," says Hall, "is a proud covetousness ;

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a dry thirst of honour ; the longing disease of reason ; an aspiring and gallant madness." And again, "Superstition is Godless religion, devout impiety." He carries his figurative descriptions to a point where they are more ingenious than precise. "He is a Spanish soldier on an Italian theatre ; a bladder full of wind, a skin full of words, and a wise man's fool." The "ancient Master of Morality" whom Hall professed to follow never allows us to transfer to one character what he says of another. Hall does. His didactic purpose led him to enumerate abstractions rather than to record traits and actions ; he is not only less vivid but less exact than Theophrastus. For all their pleasant quaintness and charm, Hall's Characters resemble rather the personified abstractions of medieval allegory than the living types created by the successor of Aristotle. Hall pursues "wit" perseveringly, but often captures nothing but its shadow. His crackle of conceits is not the spontaneous display of Fuller, but a display in which the pyrotechnics sometimes hang fire. But, if the purists will permit, we may take delight in his quaintness. For instance, his description of the "superstitious" contains some odd lore, mocked at with a dry, quaint humour :

This man dares not stir forth, till his breast be crossed and his face sprinkled. If but a hare cross him the way, he returns ; or, if his journey began, unawares, on the dismal day : or, if

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he stumbled at the threshold. If he sees a snake unkill'd, he fears a mischief; if the salt fall towards him, he looks pale and red; and is not quiet, till one of the waiters have poured wine on his lap: and, when he sneezeth, thinks them not his friends that uncover not. In the morning, he listens whether the crow crieth even or odd; and, by that token, presages of the weather. If he hear but a raven croak from the next roof, he makes his will; or if a bittour fly over his head by night; but, if his troubled fancy shall second his thoughts with the dream of a fair garden, or green rushes, or the salutation of a dead friend, he takes leave of the world and says he cannot live. He will never set to sea but on a Sunday: neither ever goes without an *Erra Pater* in his pocket. St. Paul's day, and St. Swithen's, with the Twelve, are his Oracles; which he dares believe against the almanack. . . . Every dark grove and pictured wall strikes him with an awful but carnal devotion. Old wives and stars are his counsellors: his night-spell is his guard; and charms his physicians. He wears Paracelsian characters for the toothache; and a little hallowed wax is his antidote for all evils. . . . Some ways, he will not go; and some he dares not: either there are bugges, or he feigneth them: every lanthorn is a ghost and every noise is of chains.

Though his morality be pious (we may imagine Mr. Pope saying) his fancy is Gothick. Indeed, the contrast with Theophrastus needs no great skill to detect; but the turn given to the Character by Hall was fairly closely reproduced by his followers, who increased beyond enumeration towards the middle of the century. A "Character" bibliography published by Mr. E. C. Baldwin covers seven or eight closely printed pages; and, though it includes numerous short pamphlets and a few items which are

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not strictly characters, this alone will show the popularity of the form in the seventeenth century. Not every book with the word "character" in its title-page contains characters in our sense; this is particularly the case with French books, for quite half the books enumerated in the slovenly bibliography of the "Grands Ecrivains Français" edition of La Bruyère are not Characters at all. The same remark applies to some of the Character tracts in the Harleian Miscellany. Many of these tail off into political abuse, denunciations of the Muggletonians or libels on the Oxford Royalists; but most of them possess that extraordinary verve and "huffe-snuffe rhetorick" of the seventeenth-century pasquill, and so deserve a word before returning to the larger and more regular collections. The mere title "The Character of a Coffee-House" (1673) shows a departure from the true character, but its mouthing has a vigour and tub-thumping rampage which remind one of nothing less than snarling Tom Nashe himself.

The room stinks of tobacco worse than hell of brimstone, and is as full of smoke as their heads that frequent it, whose humours are as various as those of Bedlam, and their discourse oftentimes as heathenish and dull as their liquor; that liquor, which by its look and taste, you may reasonably guess to be Pluto's diet drink, that witches tipples out of dead men's skulls, when they ratify to Belzebub their sacramental vows. This Stygian puddle-seller was formerly notorious for his ill-

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favoured cap, that aped a turban, and, in conjunction with his anti-Christian face, made him appear perfect Turk : but of late, his wife being grown acquainted with gallants, and the provocative virtue of chocolate, he finds a broad-brimmed hat more necessary : when he comes to fill you a dish, you may take him for Guy Faux with a dark lanthorn in his hand, for no sooner can you taste it, but it scalds your throat, as if you had swallowed the gun-powder treason ; though he seems never so demure, you cannot properly call him Pharisee, for he never washes either out or inside of his pots or dishes, till they be as black as an usurer's conscience ; and . . .

But this takes us far away from the sober moral philosophy of the Character-writers to the swash-buckling pamphlets of an earlier age, represented by "Pierce Penniless," "Have with you to Saffron Walden," the Marprelate tracts, and Middleton's extraordinary "Black Book."

After Hall, the most voluminous Character-writers were Overbury, Earle, Nicolas Breton, and Samuel Butler ; there are numbers of others, including Cleveland and Flecknoe (who published "Fifty-Five Enigmatical Characters"). Lamb's paragon, the Duchess of Newcastle, inserted a few characters in her "CCXI Sociable Letters" ; Buckingham wrote the "Character of an Ugly Woman" ; Denham, "The True Character of a Presbyterian" ; Oldham, the friend of Dryden, "The Character of a Certain Ugly old Priest" ; and, of course, there is the famous essay-character by Lord Halifax, "The Character of a Trimmer," Habington, the author of "Castara,"



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old Fuller, Thomas May, Settle, and L'Estrange all wrote characters. Yet they are outnumbered by the characters published anonymously. The rage for characters went so far that Cyrano de Bergerac's "Lettres Diverses" and "Lettres Satyriques" were translated under the title of "Satyricall Characters." There were seventeen impressions of Overbury's "Characters" between 1614 and 1664.

Sir Thomas Overbury (1581-1613) is chiefly remembered now by the extraordinary circumstances of his murder; he was poisoned in the Tower, at the instigation of the Countess of Essex. This sordid chapter of English history fortunately does not concern us. The popularity of his characters has not quite disappeared even now: the charming "Milk-maid" is often reprinted in anthologies of English prose, sometimes with the addition of the "Franklin." A number of the pieces collected under his name are not certainly by Overbury, but it was he who found out the way to a wider popularity for the character. Abandoning the abstract and moralizing tone of Hall, he took over and developed his conceits and quaintness. But his chief alteration was in sketching the familiar characters of the day in all their idiosyncrasies, in place of the few general and permanent types recorded by Theophrastus, whom Hall had tried to imitate in this respect. Such are the topical characters as "A Braggadochio Welsh-  
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man," "An Affectate Traveller," "A Roaring Boy," "A Precisian," "A Drunken Dutchman resident in England"; and when he describes some more permanent type it is not general qualities he looks for, but the peculiar features of their Jacobean embodiment. His Amorist comes in like Hamlet, "untrussed, unbuttoned and ungartered"; his fine gentleman "speaks Euphues, not so gracefully as heartily"; his tailor "handleth the Spanish pike, to the hazard of many poor Egyptian vermins"; his chambermaid "reads *Greenes* works over and over" and is "carried away with the 'Mirror of Knight-hood.'" This departure from the classic norm of Theophrastus, this substitution of detailed contemporary miniatures for the general portraits of Hall, has its compensations.

Overbury was soon imitated by Earle (1601-1665), and if their characters speedily grew antiquated and must for ever remain curiosities off the great high-road of literature, that very neglect as well as their oddity will endear them the more to certain readers. Those who are interested in Elizabethan literature will find much vivid information about Elizabethan manners in these Character-writers. If we are looking for what is universal and permanent—"classic"—in Elizabethan literature, we must, of course, go to other and greater men; but if we are not ashamed to read old, second-rate books which Lamb and Sir Walter

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Scott and even Coleridge found entertaining and stimulating, then we should not grudge a few evenings to Earle and Overbury. That "fair and happy milkmaid" whose "excellencies stand in her so silently, as if they had stolen upon her without her knowledge," is certainly of the same family as Isaac Walton's Maudlen. And how many curious scenes and persons of Elizabethan England are suggested by Earle's and Overbury's numerous satirical pieces: the courtier "in Paul's, with a pick-tooth in his hat, cape-cloak, and a long stocking"; the country gentleman who goes to Court "in yellow stockings, and if it be winter, in a slight taffety cloak, and pumps and pantoffles"; the Puritan who murmurs at "anything the law allows, but marriage and March beer"; the almanac-maker whose verses "have a worse pace than ever had Rochester hackney"; the Inns of Court man who "is distinguished from a scholar by a pair of silk stockings and a beaver hat"; the antiquary who "will go you forty miles to see a saint's well or a ruined abbey"; the carrier who is "like the vault in Gloster church, that conveys whispers to a distance"; the constable who is "a great stickler in the tumults of double jugs."

The characters and quaint phrases in Earle and Overbury are inexhaustible; they are a kind of written picture-book of Elizabethan England. Breton (1545-1626) published a book of characters in 1616

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under the title of "The Good and the Bad." These took a turn different from both Hall and Overbury; they are much less vivid and entertaining; they are sententious and "pragmatical," being in fact an imitation of Bacon's essays in character form, without becoming entirely moral essays of the kind whose best-known example is Feltham's "Resolves." That tendency towards a mere catalogue of qualities, which is one of the gravest defects of the character, is particularly marked in Breton. One of his most pleasant pieces, the "Good Wife," falls badly into this trap:

She is the eye of wariness, the tongue of silence, the hand of labour, and the heart of love; a companion of kindness, a mistress of passion, an exercise of patience, and an example of experience. She is the kitchen physician, the chamber comfort, the hall's care, and the parlour's grace. She is . . .

After a few pages of this we say with Prince Hal, "Breathe thyself a while."

Samuel Butler (1612-1680), "Hudibras" Butler, is the last English Character-writer of any importance, except Halifax. He left no fewer than 120 Characters, which were not printed until his "Remains" were issued in 1759. These sometimes run to the length of several pages, and the essay, which, in the shape of *Spectator* and *Tatler*, was soon to engulf the character, is already foreshadowed. The amusing "Small Poet" is directed against Mr. Saintsbury's minor

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Caroline poets—it mentions Benlowes by name—and is an interesting piece of early criticism, conducted with spirit and verve, if not with urbanity. The vigour of Butler's prose puts him well above the other English Character-writers as a satirist. There is a new sound in lines like this, something different from quaint conceits, odd humours, and moral scolding, a sting and tartness which are very rare in the Elizabethans :

There are some that drive a trade in writing in praise of other writers (like rooks, that bet on gamesters' hands), not at all to celebrate the learned author's merits, as they would show but their own wits, of which he is but the subject. The lechery of this vanity has spawned more writers than the civil war. For those whose modesty must not endure to hear their own praises spoken may yet publish of themselves the most notorious vapours imaginable.

Again, under the heading of "A Modern Politician," Butler says :

He believes there is no way of thriving so easy and certain as to grow rich by defrauding the public ; for public thieveries are more safe and less prosecuted than private, like robberies committed between sun and sun, which the country pays and no one is greatly concerned in ; and as the monster of many heads has less wit in them all than any one reasonable person, so the monster of many purses is easier cheated than any one indifferent, crafty fool.

The character there has become the satirical essay ; unfortunately for Butler there was no *Spectator* or  
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*Tatler* to produce him to the world, and these excellent pieces lie buried under that ominous title of "Remains." Butler's memory was also obscured by the fact that he was a Tory, while most of the critics were Whigs; recent critics have been more just, though the efforts to revive his prose have hardly been successful.

French literature contains few characters in the English model, but it is exceedingly rich in "portraits." The "Caractères" of La Bruyère, the outstanding examples of the kind in French, are distinctly nearer portraits than any of the English works named; nevertheless the numerous and contradictory "keys" to La Bruyère show that his characters are less personal and more general than is sometimes asserted. La Bruyère is less primitive than his English predecessors, of whom he was no doubt entirely ignorant. He has neither the simple piety which underlies Hall's writing nor the affection for quaintness and conceits which marks the Characters of Overbury and Earle. He translated Theophrastus, whose book certainly suggested to him the device of character-writing, but the most superficial acquaintance with La Bruyère will show how different he is from any earlier English writer. There are perhaps French predecessors of La Bruyère who more nearly resemble Overbury and Hall, but they must be very obscure; the "Satyricall Characters" of



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Cyrano de Bergerac already referred to are more similar in style, but are in fact "Epistles" and are directed against individuals.

La Bruyère's work is really a skilful combination of the essay of Montaigne, the maxim of La Rochefoucauld, the portrait of Mlle de Scudéry, and the character of Theophrastus. The titles of his chapters, "De la Ville," "Des Femmes," "De la Société et de la Conversation," demonstrate how far he had departed from the old character form; the characters themselves are sometimes (not always) descriptions of particular persons, and are interwoven with maxims and sententious reflections. La Bruyère's purpose was vaster and more methodical than that of the English writers, who probably wrote at hazard from casual inspiration with no particular plan. But this genial carelessness did not suit the France of Louis XIV, so preoccupied with order, and La Bruyère evidently meant to give a general description of the manners of all classes in his time—in fact, his sub-title, "Mœurs du Siècle," says as much. The characters are inserted as illustrations to the general observations enounced; moreover, they are usually very short and occupy a smaller proportion of the book than the maxims and reflections. Quotations will show more clearly than analysis how La Bruyère constructed his characters and how he used them to illustrate a thesis. It will be seen that they are sometimes so

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slight as to deserve the name of anecdotes rather than of characters. In the chapter "Des Biens de Fortune" occurs the famous remark about the "Partisans"—the under revenue-farmers who were permitted, by the fiscal laws of the Monarchy, to pillage the people for their own profit.

Les P.T.S. [*i.e.* *Partisans*] nous font sentir toutes les passions l'une après l'autre. L'on commence par le mépris à cause de leur obscurité. On les envie ensuite, on les hait, on les craint, on les estime quelquefois, et on les respecte. L'on vit assez pour finir à leur égard par la compassion.

This remark (whose psychological profundity exposes the gap between La Bruyère and Overbury) is followed by a series of portraits or characters under feigned names, Sosie, Arsure, Cresus. Some are the merest anecdotes with a sting in the tail :

*Sylvan* de ses deniers a acquis de la naissance et un autre nom. Il est Seigneur de la Paroisse où ses aieuls payaient la taille : il n'aurait pu autrefois entrer Page chez *Cleobule*, et il est son gendre.

The character is reduced to a mere *trait d'esprit*. But others are longer and more truly characters ; for example, this of *Periandre* from the same section :

On ne peut mieux user de sa fortune que fait *Periandre* : elle lui donne du rang, du crédit, de l'autorité : déjà on ne lui prie plus d'accorder son amitié, on implore sa protection. Il a commencé par dire de soi-même, *un homme de ma sorte*,

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il passe à dire, *un homme de ma qualité*, il se donne pour tel, et il n'y a personne de ceux à qui il prête de l'argent, ou qu'il reçoit à sa table, qui est délicate, qui veuille s'y opposer. Sa demeure est superbe, un dorique règne dans tous ses dehors, ce n'est pas une porte, c'est un portique : est-ce la maison d'un particulier est-ce un Temple ? Le peuple s'y trompe. Il est le Seigneur dominant de tout le quartier : c'est lui que l'on envie et dont on voudrait voir la chute, c'est lui dont la femme par son collier de perles s'est fait des ennemies de toutes les Dames du voisinage. Tout se soutient dans cet homme, rien encore ne se dement dans cette grandeur qu'il a acquise, dont il ne doit rien, qu'il a payée. Que son père si vieux et si caduc n'est-il mort il y a vingt ans et avant qu'il se fit dans le monde aucune mention de Periandre ! Comment pourrait-il soutenir ces odieuses pancartes qui déchiffrent les conditions, et qui souvent font rougir la veuve et les héritiers ? Les supprimera-t-il aux yeux de toute une ville jalouse, maligne, clairvoyante, et aux dépens de mille gens qui veulent absolument aller tenir leur rang à des obsèques ? Veut-on d'ailleurs qu'il fasse de son père un *Noble homme*, et peut-être un *Honorable homme*—lui qui est Messire ?

It is hardly necessary to point out how superior that is in observation and precise expression to the humbler English characters. They will always interest Englishmen for various reasons, but never any but the most antiquarian of foreigners. La Bruyère belongs to European literature. He may not be so excellent a moralist and prose writer as French critics believe, but he cannot be ignored as either. Moreover, his indirect influence was immense. He did his work so thoroughly that he had few direct imitators, none of any importance. Pierre de Gouz,

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Brillon, the Abbé Bourdelon, Mme de Genlis are quite insignificant. But the "Caractères" became a kind of quarry for other and more hasty builders of literature. On the one hand, La Bruyère supplied models for the innumerable portraits in French memoirs, and perhaps helped to give their succinctness and elegance to the equally innumerable *éloges* and short biographies. On the other hand, the writers of comedies and the journalists of the early eighteenth century pillaged from him and imitated him continually. For many years the recipe for a French comedy was: Take a character from La Bruyère, give him another name, involve him in an action lasting less than twenty-four hours, and all occurring in one place, and make from it five acts of dialogue as witty as possible; name the play from the main quality or passion embodied in the principal character. As to the journalists, the reader has only to turn over his *Spectators* and *Tatlers*, or the *Spectateur Français* of Marivaux, to see how conscientiously La Bruyère was followed. Marivaux was particularly skilled in the psychological sketch which hovers between the portrait and the character; it suited his gift of minute analysis and the fine preciousness of his style. Examples, which can be detached from their surroundings without loss, will be found in his comedies as well as in his novels and periodicals.

In the eighteenth century the portrait-character

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flourished among the journalists who contributed to the numerous *Mirrors*, *Adventurers*, *Loungers*, *Observers*, not to mention *Ramblers*. A large collection might be drawn from these sources. But the voracious novel, which has absorbed so many literary forms in its amorphous bulk, devoured the character as well, and so effectually as to leave little trace. The novel tends more and more to deal with the exceptional, not the typical, personality, which it reveals by a multiplicity of touches and little characteristics spread through the book; or it tries to sum up a character in an epigram, not always successfully. The character might contrive to bear up against the competition of the drama in times when new plays were rarely printed, but the attractions of the novel are overwhelming. The detached character, in the form given it by Theophrastus and Overbury and La Bruyère, is dead. But the portrait lives on. It is worth noting that some of the finest portraits in the histories and memoirs of England and France belong to the period just succeeding that of the Character-writers. This is particularly noticeable in England. Under the slightly misleading title of "Characters from the Histories and Memoirs of the Seventeenth Century" Mr. D. N. Smith has published a wonderful collection of portraits. He draws chiefly upon Clarendon, who is our supreme writer in this *genre*, but also upon Fuller, Aubrey and Burnet, who

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is perhaps second only to Clarendon. He omits the delightful portraits in Naunton's "*Fragmenta Regalia*," which are outside his period; but these are eminently worth reading, particularly those of Leicester and Sir John Perrot. Naunton must have been a crafty "politician" of the true Elizabethan breed. Among the vast number of eighteenth-century portraits those of Lord Chesterfield are particularly good. The Duc de Saint-Simon holds the same place among French writers of portraits that Clarendon does with us, but nearly all the better-known French memoirs will furnish excellent examples. An afternoon at Hampton Court Picture Gallery with Hamilton's "*Mémoires*" is an essential experience.

Biography, which, like history, inherited the portrait-character, has made poor use of the legacy, at least in England. It is generally conceded that the French biography is not only shorter but more readable and artistic than its English counterpart. Perhaps that is due in part to the tradition of La Bruyère; it is certainly partly due to Sainte-Beuve, that indefatigable draughtsman in character. The portraits in modern English history are generally poor; compare Mr. Belloc's efforts in his popular "*French Revolution*" with any minor artist of the seventeenth or eighteenth century. The difference is considerable. But in our times the "portrait-

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biography " has acquired a fresh span of life and popularity with the brilliant studies of Mr. Lytton Strachey. After reading his " Dr. Arnold " one feels that the English " portrait " need not fear comparison with those of any other country ; it would be hard to find a living French " portraitist " who surpasses or even equals Mr. Strachey. But " Eminent Victorians " carries us far away from the old books of Characters ; from Bishop Hall to Mr. Strachey is indeed a long step.



## XIX

### FOUR MODERN POETS

THESE four French and Belgian poets all belonged to the end of the last century or the beginning of this; all are now dead. They lived in that epoch of immense industrial activity, of almost blind faith in commercial "progress," which lies between the years 1870 and 1914. These poets were melancholy and remote from the life of their time; they turned from the brutal energy of modern commercial life to the past; their art was an art of reverie. In all, the sense of exile, of being born out of their due time, of living in surroundings hostile to them, was intense and poignant; they turned to the eighteenth century, to the Renaissance, to the Middle Ages, to ancient Rome and Greece, seeking a life, an attitude, more in harmony with their own natures. Poets, indeed, more often look backwards than forwards; but in these poets there are an unmistakable nostalgia and regret for a lost world, a brooding over vanished beauty.

It is significant that the town of Bruges, so exquis-

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itely interpreted by Rodenbach, refused a statue of the poet-novelist because he had not praised the new factories and had regretted the old tranquil streets and canals. The poetic art of Rodenbach is so delicate that one is almost afraid to touch it critically for fear of marring its frail beauty. Rodenbach has been censured as a mind lacking robustness and masculinity, as an artist of the vague and trifling ; and there is certainly a gulf between his work and that of Emile Zola. What is obvious is the almost tremulous sensibility of Rodenbach, a sensibility which was set vibrating by things which would pass unperceived by others : those early poems about his childhood and youth often remind the reader of Loti's memories of his childhood—there is the same vividness and the same penetrating melancholy. Our understanding of poetry, particularly of modern poetry, frequently depends upon our ability to relate it to our own spiritual experience : it is quite easy to see that the art of Rodenbach may wholly elude many readers of a certain type, who will only feel impatient at his regrets and surprised at the apparent lack of content. The idea of expressing some " message," anything hortatory or improving, would have been most repugnant to him ; but he was not shallow or even a mere dilettante, for he works upon us indirectly and subtly. To Rodenbach art was the great consoler : who can doubt his sufferings, his

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poignant regrets for the fragility of all precious things—beauty, youth, innocence, the child's confidence in life and in goodness ?

Je fus de ces souffrants que leur langueur isole . .  
Je fus de ces songeurs douloureux et timides !

Modern life has no place for the poet, has none to offer. Therefore he turns to the past :

Le Passé, c'est un cher enseveli qu'on pleure,  
Que nous aimons surtout maintenant qu'il est mort . . .

And he gives to art for its own sake the passion he cannot bestow elsewhere :

Puisque l'Ennui suprême a plissé tous les fronts,  
Puisque rien d'héroïque et rien d'incorruptible  
N'est plus resté debout au-dessus des affronts  
Et que l'Idéal meurt, le front sur une Bible,

Puisque c'est bien fini, puisqu'à présent encor  
—Indice indéniable des temps de décadence—  
Devant la monstrueuse Idole au ventre d'or  
Comme au temps d'Israël, le peuple chante et danse,

Puisque c'est bien ainsi, résignez-vous, les cœurs !  
Car il vous reste l'Art, temple aux portes bénies,  
Monument de refuge où de rares liqueurs  
Font aux songes blessés de calmes agonies.

There is something more than egotism and wounded sensibility in these regrets and spasms of revolt. The

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poet regrets indeed for himself, but, half-unconsciously, his melodious lines are a lament for an ideal of human life whose funeral oration was pronounced by Burke. Turning his back on the new Tower of Babel, under "Le Règne du Silence" the poet pours out his bitterness and lassitude :

On sent que toute joie à présent est enfuie !  
A quoi peut-il servir qu'on se reprenne encor ?  
A quoi peut-il servir qu'on sonne encor du cor ?  
Le son exténué se traîne dans la pluie  
Et le son dans la pluie erre comme un radeau.  
Ah ! cette pluie en nous ! C'est comme une araignée  
Qui tisse dans notre âme avec ses longs fils d'eau  
Inexorablement une toile mouillée !  
Sans cesse cette pluie à l'âme, ce brouillard  
Qui se condense et fond en bruines accrues ;  
Comme on a mal à l'âme, et comme il se fait tard !  
Et l'âme écoute au loin pleuviner dans la rue.

Rodenbach died suddenly in 1898, at the age of forty-three. Charles Guérin, whose art derives almost equally from Rodenbach and Vigny, died in 1907, aged thirty-three ; he came from a family of *industriels*. His art is less sure than that of Rodenbach, his mind less original and profound, his style occasionally infected with the affectations of the early Symbolists ; but, like Rodenbach, he weaves his verses from the melancholy of the exile :

Des vers tristes comme toujours, vers d'amertume.

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He is more exotic and sensual, less restrained, not so pure an artist as Rodenbach. The sincerity of his despair is marred by affectations.

One suspects that the incompatibility between their temperament and that of the majority, which made the inner life of a Baudelaire or a Rodenbach tragically bitter, did not exist so sharply and completely for Guérin. We may rank him among the confessors of poetry, but not among its spiritual martyrs. The echoes of other poets are numerous in his work; he employed frequently the old fixed forms—*rondeau* and *villanelle*—which are charming indeed, but belong to the poetry of *insouciance* and light playfulness rather than to the deeper motives. Bells and swans and grey rainy evenings in his verse are too obviously derived from Rodenbach to move us as symbols of a real spiritual distress. But the book under consideration mostly contains Guérin's earliest work; for what is best of his we must look in "Le Cœur Solitaire" and "Le Semeur de Cendres," written after a moral crisis which ended in his return to Catholicism—the refuge of many delicate minds of that generation. The "Derniers Vers" have a strength and sincerity very different from these earlier verses; in spite of their Lucretian ring, there is real power in the fifty or so lines beginning:

L'amour est un sépulcre où l'on se couche à deux.

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However lugubrious, a thought so remote from facile enjoyment and insipid sentiment is not vulgar ; but in Guérin the passion for beauty and its inseparable suffering are less intense than in Rodenbach and Renée Vivien. His enemy is moral rather than æsthetic vulgarity ; his melancholy could flow naturally in the channels of the Church. For Renée Vivien the love of beauty was the motive force of life ; when it failed her, she died. In some respects the idea of Renée Vivien, this frail, rather perverse woman, with her passion for Greek art, is more poetic than her poetry. She says that “*la Beauté demeure étrange et surhumaine,*” but in her efforts to express what is strange and superhuman in beauty she incorporates too many Pre-Raphaelite accessories. One would prefer more athletic and unencumbered verses, something colder and less exotic, fewer Asiatic draperies, a less enervating atmosphere. We grow a little weary of too many languors and drooping roses and pale violets ; hers is a Hellenism of the decadence, too often weakened still more by echoes of Swinburne and Leconte de Lisle. Even the variations on the fragments of Sappho and the short poetic play *La Mort de Psappha* are touched by these defects ; after “*Anactoria*” it is too easy to write :

Son baiser est amer  
Et mord, comme le sel violent de la mer.



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Renée Vivien is happier when expressing that almost mystic love of flowers, so noticeable in American women poets ; she does persuade us that her " blanches violettes " are symbols of a " strange and superhuman beauty." She is happy again with the " Satyresse " :

Sa couche a le parfum du thym et des bruyères ;

and the " Faunesse " :

Elle appelle les vents sans parfum et la Neige  
Qui promet l'impossible et douce chasteté.

The translations and variations from Sappho are perhaps her best poetic work. If the two great odes seem weak in her version, it is because French cannot render Greek :

Je frissonne toute, et ma langue est brisée ;  
Subtile, une flamme a traversé ma chair,  
Et ma sueur coule ainsi que la rosée  
Après de la mer.

That despair, characteristic of the modern poet, which we have already noticed in Rodenbach and Guérin, finds a supreme expression in the Swinburnian lines of " La Nuit Latente " :

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Je suis la fervente disciple  
De la mer et du soir,  
La luxure unique et multiple  
Se mire à mon miroir . . .  
Mon visage de clown me navre  
Je cherche ton lit de cadavre  
Ainsi que le calme d'un havre,  
O mon beau Désespoir !

. . . Et lasse de la beauté fourbe,  
De la joie où l'esprit s'embourbe,  
Je me détourne et je me courbe  
Sur ton vitreux néant.

Weak though these lines are, there is something tragic for those who can read behind them: the poet, weary of the struggle for beauty against the world, abandons the contest in despair and longs for nothingness. Beauty is "fourbe," not because it is "a vain and doubtful good" in itself, but because it can only be really expressed in an artistic civilization; to love beauty sincerely in a mechanical civilization is so painful that "le néant" is preferable.

Maurice du Plessys, who died in January 1924, is the most unhappy figure among these poets. After a brief period of prosperity, he dragged out a life of poverty and sickness, and was rescued from the public hospital by the subscription of other men of letters, only to die at home. If ever a man was a martyr to an ideal of art it was Maurice du Plessys. He was fiercely opposed to democracy and realism,

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passionately in love with the æsthetic ideals of the Renaissance and ancient Greece; he would not condescend to the least compromise, nor lower his "panache" one inch. Neglect, poverty, solitude, the contempt of the successful, the indifference of the swarming multitudes—nothing could move him; he lived in his garret with his thoughts for patrimony and consolation. His friend, M. Ernest Raynaud, wrote a poem called "Consolation à Maurice du Plessys"; the poet returned it haughtily with the phrase, "I do not need consolation." Du Plessys carried his contempt for the "moderns" so far that he wrote long poems in the dialect of the "Chanson de Roland"; even these shorter pieces are often composed in the language of Ronsard, without being imitative of his style. They are often more strange and ingenious than beautiful. Yet that he could write a poem of poignant simplicity these lines of prayer will show :

Esprit du Père, à moi l'onde qui désaltère  
Le pèlerin sous les doux palmiers arrêté.  
C'est depuis si longtemps que, rebut de la terre,  
Je suis comme la pierre en son iniquité !  
Trainant comme Saül ma pourpre solitaire,  
J'y cache les débris de mon cœur éclaté. . . .  
Esprit, verse ton huile en ma lampe de terre.

The "world and what it fears" were nothing to Maurice du Plessys in comparison with his vision of

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truth and beauty. Doubtless to the "world" his life of poverty and solitude seemed an ignoble failure. It was a noble success : when he died there was not a single stain upon his "pourpre solitaire."

"Œuvres de Georges Rodenbach." (Paris : Mercure de France.)

"Premiers et Derniers Vers de Charles Guérin." (Paris : Mercure de France.)

"Poèmes de Renée Vivien." (Paris : Lemerre.)

"Le Feu Sacré." Par Maurice du Plessys. (Paris : Garnier.)

## XX

### A FRENCH STUDY OF MASSINGER

IN a short preface to this excellent study of Massinger, Professor Emile Legouis informs us that the author, M. Maurice Chelli, after being seriously wounded in 1914, died in 1918 at the age of thirty-five. France suffered immense loss in the war by the deaths of young artists and intellectuals, as one is constantly realizing by the publication of their posthumous works. It would be invidious to dwell on one or other of the victims in this incalculable sacrifice, but of M. Chelli we can at least say that by his death English literature suffers too, for he had a wide knowledge of our literature, had specialized in the Elizabethans, and would probably have continued this line of research—to the benefit of English studies in France. His “Massinger” is a serious and thorough examination of that dramatist’s works; it will interest even English experts in Elizabethan drama; it will be a useful handbook to the general reader, and it will interpret Massinger worthily to French students. Unfortunately, this

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study, long as it is, sees the light in a truncated form. For reasons of economy a complete translation of the *Maid of Honour* has been omitted; worse still, the indispensable "Etude sur la Collaboration de Massinger avec Fletcher et son Groupe" still awaits a publisher. This omission, which, by the way, includes the Bibliography and the list of Massinger's sources, adds to the difficulty of estimating the value of M. Chelli's study of one of the most complex subjects in Elizabethan drama. It is to be hoped that we shall be given an opportunity of reading in the future this necessary counterpart.

As all readers of Elizabethan plays know, the first difficulty—now largely resolved—is to define the limits of "Massinger." In addition to the fifteen plays by Massinger alone there are seven by Massinger and Fletcher, three by Massinger, Fletcher, and Field, one by Massinger, Fletcher, Field, and Daborne. Field had a share in *The Fatal Dowry*. But, as if this were not complicated enough, modern criticism has detected Massinger's hand in the revising of *Henry VIII*, of six of Fletcher's plays, of two of Beaumont's, of *The Coxcomb* by Beaumont and Fletcher, and of Dekker's *The Virgin Martyr*. This subject of collaboration "surprises by himself" a complex literary problem, which can hardly be called finally settled, since the evidence, however convincing, is circumstantial and the results con-

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jectural, even if one cannot disprove them. It is certainly confounding to the amateur who, for example, having read *The Virgin Martyr* in his Pearson's "Dekker," finds the same play at the head of Hartley Coleridge's "Massinger"; while poor Rowley is always dragged in someone else's wake.

Even if these perplexities of collaboration and revision are set aside, if attention is concentrated on the plays by Massinger alone, intelligent appreciation is not easy. What is it we admire in Elizabethan drama generally and in the plays of Massinger in particular? Different critics have concentrated upon those aspects which were most in harmony with their own interests, and in so doing have left the objects of their admiration open to attack. Most youthful readers are content to follow Lamb and to intoxicate themselves with the poetry of the Elizabethan dramatists with little or no regard for the more complex dramatic beauties or defects; what matters the fantastic improbability of Tamberlain when we are at an age to entertain divine Zenocrate, and what do we care for "dramatic probability" when we are thrilled by the face that burned the topless towers of Ilium? Under the spell of Elizabethan rhetoric an inexperienced reader thinks little and cares less about the plays as dramatic spectacles subject to the laws of the drama. But this is not

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all; other critics have been interested in the moral aspects of Elizabethan drama, others have concentrated upon problems of authorship and versification, others again have dwelt upon the brilliance of particular and exceptional characters, the felicity of a few isolated scenes; few have examined any of the dramatists impartially from every point of view, particularly that of the success of the plays as plays. It is here that the voluminous and painstaking study of Massinger by M. Chelli is interesting, because he never loses sight of the fact that the works he is criticizing are primarily and essentially plays, and must finally be judged as plays. It is significant that the pages he devotes to Massinger's style dwell rather upon its defects, its repetitions and rhetorical tricks than upon its poetic qualities. In other words, M. Chelli was attracted by Massinger as a dramatist, not Massinger as a poet; and Massinger possesses as a dramatist those qualities of sobriety, order, and rhetorical declamation which we should expect a Frenchman to admire. He is the nearest to Corneille of all the Elizabethans. But it is precisely this French point of view in M. Chelli's study, as well as its French thoroughness and (if I may say so) its French prejudices, which make this book so interesting.

One of M. Chelli's most stimulating chapters, because one disagrees with it most, is that headed

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“Conditions Générales du Théâtre Elizabéthan.” It illustrates admirably an intelligent, not uncommon, but almost certainly mistaken view of Elizabethan drama; it might be described as the French critical fallacy of judging a play by an undefined standard of *vraisemblance*. In other words, the critic asks himself: “Does such a plot or situation or character appear *vraisemblable* to me and the honest gentlemen, my friends? No. Then the play is defective.” It is a purely subjective test, for what might have appeared improbable to M. Chelli might not have made that effect on Swinburne. *Vraisemblance* is an excellent test of French drama, particularly classic French comedy; but it has a singular defect—it cannot be applied successfully to Greek or to Elizabethan plays. *Vraisemblance* is not the same thing as imaginative truth. We know where this led Voltaire:

Il est déjà contre la vraisemblance qu’Œdipe, qui règne depuis si longtemps, ignore comment son prédécesseur est mort; mais qu’il ne sache pas même si c’est aux champs ou à la ville que ce meurtre a été commis, et qu’il ne donne pas la moindre raison ni la moindre excuse de son ignorance, j’avoue que je ne connais pas de terme pour exprimer une pareille absurdité.

The *Œdipe* of M. de Voltaire is entirely free from these *absurdités*; it is filled with the most ingenious “*vraisemblances*”; yet, such is the perversity of

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man, hardly a living person, even in France, can be brought to read through his *Œdipe*, while many thousands of people in many countries read *Œdipus Tyrannus* with delight. Does not this suggest that *vraisemblance* is not the only, the crucial, the irrevocable test of dramatic excellence, as many French and some English critics would like us to believe?

This attitude led M. Chelli, for all his intelligence, into some curious judgments; "Qu'est-ce que *Le Juif de Malte*," he says, "sinon une suite de vues, une galerie d'horreurs?" Well, as Mr. T. S. Eliot has suggested, it might be "the farce of the Old English humour, the terribly serious, even savage comic humour, the humour which spent its last breath on the decadent genius of Dickens." Whether Mr. Eliot's ingenious suggestion is or is not defensible does not matter; the point is that if you apply only the *vraisemblance* test to Marlowe you are certain to go wrong, as you would go wrong with Sophocles or Aristophanes. So that we surprise M. Chelli thinking and writing this: "Au début, Lear est trop naïf, Regan et Goneril trop menteuses, Cordelia trop obstinée."

One result of this—for it is only possible to touch on a few aspects of M. Chelli's study—is that he went to great pains to prove, what almost anybody could see, that the plots, intrigues, and some of the characters in Massinger's tragi-comedies are highly im-

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probable. But the fact is so obvious and notorious that a critic might really ask whether Massinger and other Elizabethans had not some purpose in showing improbable stories on the stage besides that of inability to compose probable ones. There was, after all, such a thing as romance—and romance can be a convention. It is quite true that M. Chelli's method led him to prefer *The Maid of Honour* to Massinger's other tragi-comedies and to applaud the qualities "d'ordre et d'organisation" in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*; but he did not think the latter play "interesting by its intrigue," and he discovers an *invraisemblance* in the *crédulité excessive* of Overreach, where one might be tempted to see another case of the gods making blind one they wished to destroy.

It would be incorrect to leave the reader with an impression that M. Chelli's *vraisemblance* theories vitiate his whole book—it is not so; these painstaking and elaborately prepared pages contain many criticisms of Massinger that are just and illuminating. Here, for instance, M. Chelli gives us a neat little analysis:

La théorie de l'amour est assez nette chez Massinger. Le fondant sur une distinction qu'il n'a pas inventé, qui était, par exemple, toute prête et élaborée dans Fletcher, il distingue d'abord *love* et *lust*. *Lust*, c'est l'amour purement sensuel, dont la seule cause est l'attrait physique, le charme animal; *love*, au contraire, est fondé sur une appréciation raisonnable de tous les mérites d'une personne, beauté, noblesse, cœur, intelligence.



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Apart from *vraisemblance*, M. Chelli treated Massinger with more respect than Coleridge did. He praised Massinger for his direct and vigorous style and for his sobriety, and insisted on his "langue oratoire, avec ses périodes, son ordonnance déductive, ses exemplaires et ses corollaires." He showed by long quotations how Massinger's fondness for debate led him time after time to create scenes of judicial or quasi-judicial argument; such scenes occur in all but three of the plays by Massinger alone. He investigated and carefully catalogued the rhetorical devices of Massinger, which show a curious tendency to repeat the same phrases or the same classical references in similar situations; thus the idea:

And, it being in suspense, on whose fair tent  
Wing'd Victory will make her glorious stand . . .

occurs in almost those same words in six of his plays. Adonis is similarly referred to with a strange lack of variety. M. Chelli recognized in Massinger an "habilité professionnelle," an art which often "centre dans une personne le principe qui distribue la vie, qui organise le mouvement, et met, dans la diversité, la pleine harmonie"; and "le groupement du personnel." He praised also Massinger's "continuity of development" and held that the dramatist succeeded best when he presented a "dominating character in a vast field of activity." Again,  
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contrasting Massinger favourably with Fletcher, he calls the former "un ouvrier qui croit à son art," and concludes, "s'il ne fut pas poète par l'imagination, il fut artiste par son idée haute et réfléchie de la forme littéraire." When we remember that M. Chelli was criticizing plays written, in an ample and involved diction, in a foreign language three centuries ago, it is impossible not to admire his learning and critical skill; he wrote of the Elizabethans with a mastery and knowledge which are not very common even in England. He seems to have carried in his memory every plot, every scene, every character, almost every line, Massinger created. He must have known the plays nearly by heart. In spite of certain failings, his book is an excellent companion to the study of Massinger—one might even say it is a real contribution to Massinger criticism. The plays could hardly be investigated more carefully and thoroughly.

"Le Drame de Massinger." Par Maurice Chelli. (Paris Société d'Editions "Les Belles-Lettres.")

## XXI

### ROME AND THE FARNESE PALACE

**B**ACON'S phrase "drenched in matter" exactly describes M. de Navenne's delightful gossip about and around the great Farnese Palace in Rome, which is now the French Embassy. Nearly ten years ago M. de Navenne published a book on the early history of the palace and its occupiers, ending with the death of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese in 1589. This work was "couronné" by the Académie Française, and its successor deserves the same or greater honour. There are two reasons why this book is such pleasant reading—one is the charming, urbane, cultivated personality and style of the author; the other is the immense quantity of curious and interesting information about Rome in the last three centuries, its history, its personalities—diplomatic, royal, papal, artistic, foreign, and Italian—its antiquities, its fine arts, its varying aspects at different periods. Naturally, much of the information can be found elsewhere, for the books on Rome would probably fill the floor of the Coliseum, but few books of this discursive

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kind are so charmingly<sup>a</sup> written. Moreover, the minute account of the Farnese Palace and its successive inhabitants contains much original information; any visitor to Rome who has read M. de Navenne's work will look at the Farnese Palace with renewed pleasure, and certainly a more intelligent comprehension.

The Farnese family alone provide a vast amount of material, though the most splendid members of the family—Pope Paul III, Giulia Farnese, Pierluigi, and Cardinal Alessandro—do not appear in this volume. Still, the direct line of Farnese did not end until 1731, and Francis II, King of Sicily and Naples, “in whose veins ran some drops of the blood of Paul III,” only died, in Paris, in 1894. The most important of the Farnese who appear in this volume is Cardinal Odoardo, second son of the great Alexander Farnese, the Duke of Parma—that very Parma of whom Queen Elizabeth “thought foul scorn” that he should “pretend” to *her* dominions. Odoardo was made a Cardinal before he was twenty in an age when the Cardinalate enjoyed all the “agréments et grandeurs” of princely aristocracy and when nearly every temporal and religious prince was an enthusiastic admirer and patron of the fine arts. Cardinal Odoardo's tutor was Fulvio Orsini, a fine classical scholar, who had charge of the Farnese collections and libraries and was himself an enlightened

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collector of marbles, manuscripts, medals, inscriptions, and contemporary paintings. Orsini found the young Cardinal an enthusiastic lover of the beautiful things to which he devoted his own life ; M. de Navenne draws a striking picture of the long conversations on all kinds of topics between these two typical late Renaissance figures. Under Orsini's influence Cardinal Odoardo determined to complete the decoration of the Farnese Palace. Unlike the usual wealthy collector of to-day, the Cardinal was not content merely to purchase beautiful things ; he acquired the knowledge and taste necessary to enjoy them, and he also trusted his own taste sufficiently to patronize contemporary artists and to arrange with them the decoration of his vast palace in Rome. To him we owe the paintings of Agostino and Annibale Carracci, which still remain on the walls where the Cardinal had them painted. The modern fashion is to disparage these painters. M. de Navenne, who is an aristocrat in all his tastes, does not much admire the art of the "moderns," though he is too polite to attack them. But, to jump to the other end of the book, we may guess his attitude from this sentence on the Borghese Gardens in 1840 :

Vierge de toute souillure, la villa Borghèse tenait le premier rang parmi ces lieux de plaisance qui formaient une ceinture verdoyante autour de la cité des papes ; on l'a depuis saccagée, abandonnée, déshonorée ; le parc patricien est devenu promenade publique !

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Elsewhere he speaks of the "pretentious banality" of modern city architecture, and writes with the tenderest regret and extraordinary eloquence of the picturesque appearance of Rome and the love of art in its inhabitants before the commercial blight had settled too deeply upon Europe. At all events, M. de Navenne is far too subtle an epicure of the arts to despise the Carracci because they are not like Giotto or even like Michelangelo. In a charming paragraph which must be quoted—one would like to make a whole collection of M. de Navenne's quotable passages—he describes with great insight the poetic affinities of the Bolognese school and shows how they may still be enjoyed by those who have the courage of their own pleasure :

Les peintures qui s'étendent dans le plafond et sur les retombées de la voûte composent un poème dont les chants symétriques se déroulent en un rythme puissant. Ce sont des variations sur le thème fécond de la Fable. Les Dieux de l'Olympe triomphent sans conteste dans la Galerie, non point avec leurs gestes héroïques, mais avec les faiblesses qui les rapprochent de l'humanité. Ce n'est pas Mars, pas même Minerve qui règne dans les fresques, mais Vénus, tour à tour mère et victime de l'Amour. Depuis le père des Dieux jusqu'aux divinités des bois et des sources, depuis les héros légendaires jusqu'aux filles de rois, tous subissent le joug commun. Les personnages ne viennent pas de l'Iliade ; ils se rattachent aux créations de Virgile et d'Ovide, surtout d'Ovide. Entre le style de Carrache et celui de l'auteur des Métamorphoses, il y a des affinités secrètes ; on en decouvre également entre Annibal et le Tasse. L'époque où peignit



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le Bolognais était celle où les écrits de l'infortuné Torquato exerçaient un empire sans rival dans les cours italiennes. Hallam n'a pas tort de rattacher l'ensemble des ouvrages de l'école bolognaise à la *Jérusalem délivrée*, il aurait pu sans inconvénient accorder un honneur égal à l'*Aminta* du même auteur et au *Pastor Fido*, ce poème pastoral de Guarini qui eut, au déclin du XVI<sup>ème</sup> siècle, un succès sans précédent.

The description of the wonders of the Farnese Palace in the days of Cardinal Odoardo occupies nearly a hundred pages ; from all this wealth and glitter of marble stairs, frescoed walls, innumerable and precious objects of art which M. de Navenne dazzles us with, we take refuge in the Cardinal's library. Even that was overpoweringly sumptuous to a modern eye. Beside the huge cases of books and manuscripts were antique statuettes, bronze tables, pictures and ancient inscriptions ; there were Greek parchments annotated by the hand of Pope Paul III, codices discovered by Panvinio and Devaris—the "Agamemnon" of Æschylus, Stobæus, Tacitus—wonderful Venetian bindings, the earliest incunabula, innumerable Aldines, miniatures of Clovio, drawings by Michelangelo and Raphael, the *editio princeps* of Homer with the portrait of Piero de' Medici. Alas, it will not be found to-day : fire, pillaging troops, and the worse impiety of unworthy heirs have dispersed it ; what is left of this collection is to be found in Naples, whither it was removed by one of the

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Bourbons. Cardinal Odoardo died in 1626 and lies buried in the great church of the Gesù. But all this is the merest fraction of M. de Navenne's work ; with the most extensive knowledge and that urbanity which has already been remarked on, he guides the reader through the mazes of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century political and diplomatic history, with numerous and fascinating digressions on the art and music of the succeeding generations, and an occasional halt in which he sketches for us the social and artistic aspect of the great city at each decisive period. With him we dwell affectionately on the later decades of the eighteenth century, that golden age preceding the deluge ; and we linger over the last pages of the last chapter which precedes the fatal year of 1789.

Yet the great Revolution did not at once destroy the charm and beauty of Rome ; and it is even with some surprise that we learn how many of the excavations and alterations of modern Rome were first planned by Napoleon, when Rome was " the second city of my Empire." The period between 1820 and 1860 seems to be particularly attractive to M. de Navenne and inspires him with some eloquent chapters which will be read with the greatest appreciation by all who would like to know how Rome looked before it was " improved " into its present state. This is the Rome of Byron and Shelley, of the

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innumerable "rich milors" who invaded Italy at the head of their bank accounts, and in some cases left their bones in the Protestant cemetery; for if Rome were inexpressibly more beautiful a century ago it was also far more dangerous to health. M. de Navenne's description of the Campagna in 1840 is a vivid piece of word-painting, perhaps more exciting in his words than it ever was in reality; but—though this will hardly be believed—there were once better ways of enjoying the Campagna than crashing through it in the Frascati tram or at fifty miles an hour in a motor-car. Apparently we foreign tourists are not the only people to regret sentimentally the alteration of Rome. With the *malin* politeness of a diplomat M. de Navenne lets us guess this in his epilogue:

Les Romains ont suivi avec curiosité, une curiosité inquiète mais silencieuse, les bouleversements dont leur ville aimée était le théâtre. J'ai entendu, il y a quelque trente ans, plusieurs d'entre eux, remarquables par une haute culture et exempts de préventions, déplorer que l'aménagement de la capitale ait été remis par la force des événements dans la main des Piémontais qui, de tous les Italiens, sont peut-être les plus pratiques, mais assurément les moins artistes.

Let us not insist beyond M. de Navenne's little hint.

"Rome et le Palais Farnèse pendant les Trois Derniers Siècles." Par Ferdinand de Navenne. Two vols. (Paris: Champion.)

## XXII

### THE ITALIAN COMEDIANS

THE *Commedia dell' Arte* is essentially a creation of the Italian Renaissance ; an early troupe of the kind was brought together in 1528 by Angelo Beolco. The art grew vigorously in the sixteenth century, was at its height in the seventeenth century (when it made a profound effect on French comedy), held its own through the eighteenth century, and then rapidly declined. Its origins are very ancient. It claims as ancestors not only the masked comedians and jugglers of ancient Greece, but the Atellanes of Rome ; the " outline " of *Pulcinella*, for instance, in the seventeenth century is singularly like that of the Roman *Maccus*. On the other hand, so universal and tenacious are the types of the *Commedia dell' Arte*, and so deeply rooted the tradition, especially in Italy, that they may still be said to exist. The cinema—guilty of so much that is paltry and inept—has produced a great modern *Arlequin* in Charlie Chaplin. But to realize the vitality of the *Commedia dell' Arte* one must see the modern Italian actors.

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To see the Arlecchino of Signor Gandusio even in the comedy of Goldoni (who was an opponent of the *Commedia dell' Arte*, but could not escape its influence) is to realize the immense vitality of this tradition of acting. Signor Gandusio's Arlecchino acts with his whole body ; he is hardly still a moment, and even when still his attitude is extraordinarily expressive. Again, even the rather knockabout Neapolitan farce of the Scarpetta company, though worthless as dramatic literature, is wonderful for its acting ; the most effective scenes appear to be largely improvisations in the old tradition. With both these companies, a foreigner ignorant of the language can follow the play from the expressive acting and the eloquence of the gesture. It would be an interesting experiment to transport the Scarpetta company to London ; it would probably be a financial failure, but people would at least see the difference between acting comic situations and reciting the dialogue of a *littérateur*.

The great charm of the *Commedia dell' Arte* for us, who are weary of "uplift," is that it boldly refuses to carry a "message," except the message of mirth and spontaneous wit ; it sent its audience away better men because they had laughed heartily, not because it had endeavoured to persuade them to a course of social or moral improvement. The fixed characters of the *Commedia dell' Arte* have lived too long, have

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seen the birth and death of too many human illusions, to want to "improve" people. They go deeper into human nature than these temporary modifications allow. Under their hieratic gestures, their traditional costume, their fixed masks, they have an infinite mobility; like human nature itself, which with all its apparent mobility is really much the same from age to age. With all its mirth—often vulgar and coarse enough—the *Commedia dell' Arte* is profoundly philosophic. Not imprisoning itself in any narrow self-poisoning system, not presuming to offer nostrums for the cure of human ills and follies, never sermonizing, it offers us the spectacle of human life and bids us laugh at what we cannot amend, and should perhaps bitterly regret if it were amended. It laughs, not at little traits and temporary follies and snobberies (the pitfall of so much French comedy), but at the permanent instincts and passions of the human race. It laughs at the follies of that love which to young people seems so all important and to the aged so trivial and improvident; laughs not unsympathetically, for it is always on the side of the lovers, but as one standing far back from the spectacle of life, who half-ironically, half-jestingly, and with infinite wistfulness sees already the crisp hair grown lank and grey, the bright cheeks faded, the firm breasts fallen. It laughs at the follies of age, its ambition and avarice, coveting power and accumu-



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lating riches, when the ability to use power is fast ebbing and the scanty span of remaining years leaves little chance of enjoying wealth; it laughs at the old man's timidity which he mistakes for prudence, at his infirmities which he calls seemly gravity, at his tyranny over servants and children which he believes is lawful authority. This is Pantalone. It mocks at military glory, with its absurd pomp and display, its presumption and vanity, its boasts of prowess and interminable lying tales of impossible feats, its plumes and gaudy clothes and ignorance. This is the Captain—Spavento or Cocodrillo, Rino-ceronte or Rodomont. It laughs until the sides ache at the vanity of human knowledge. The theologian it jests at very obliquely and with prudence, for his learning is not of this world—and there is an Inquisition and—who knows?—perhaps a hereafter, where pranks are to be played among the holy angels or in less comfortable quarters. But there is no mercy for the vanity of pedants and the presumption of charlatans. That a man should take pride in himself and despise his fellows because he has kept his nose in old books (which he understands no more than we do) when he might have mended shoes or made love to Colombine; and that he should give himself airs with his jargon of Latin, his sentences from Seneca, his periods from Cicero! Or that a man with a few herbs and pills and knives and a



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foolish Græco-Latin nomenclature should torture our bodies in his presumptuous ignorance and ask money for doing it ! They indeed must be laughed at as well as the fools who are duped by them. And so we have Il Dottore, who is also Tartaglia, Guillot-Gorju, and the Médecin of Molière.

But where the *Commedia dell' Arte* is richest is in its repertory of knaves, rogues and villains, the prince and type of whom is Harlequin. Wherever men and women are gathered into societies there is an infinite necessity for simulation and dissimulation, to gratify passions, to procure necessities, to acquire power, to enjoy revenge, triumph, love ; and so strange an animal is man that there are almost as many people waiting to be deceived as there are anxious to deceive. Even in this superior age and country can we say that nobody tries to deceive, that nobody is deceived ? Harlequin is the embodiment of this mobile passion—a “man of indiarubber,” a thousand characters but always the same, turn by turn deceived and deceiver, dupe and trickster, *naïf* and artful, stupid and cunning. Even his black grinning mask has a thousand expressions, but is always Harlequin. What is this Harlequin, this sooty-faced rogue, this king of shreds and patches, in his coloured rags, with his short staff ? For some he is a peasant of Bergamo, from the lower town which was stupid, as his clever brother Trivellin came from the upper

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town. But Harlequin soon swallowed up Trivellin and added roguery to his own rusticity. He is the god Mercury, patron of thieves and vagabonds; he is the clown, the butt, who revenges himself by some slow-witted cunning; he is the peasant who hates his landlord; the people who suffer all things from their rulers and sometimes playfully shake them off their necks on to the scaffold; he is the imagination, with its wild flights and awkward landings. London is full of Harlequins in bowlers; unfortunately they are not very amusing ones, and they do not know they are Harlequins; perhaps if they did know it they would look a little less solemn and important. But Harlequin is not dead; it will be a long time before he dies. He has given up his motley and tries to be serious; but he will laugh again. His new name is Democracy. He is easily recognizable; instead of a black mask he wears a white one, and instead of a wooden sword he carries an umbrella or a rolled-up newspaper. Harlequin in life is not dead; it is only on the stage that he is dead.

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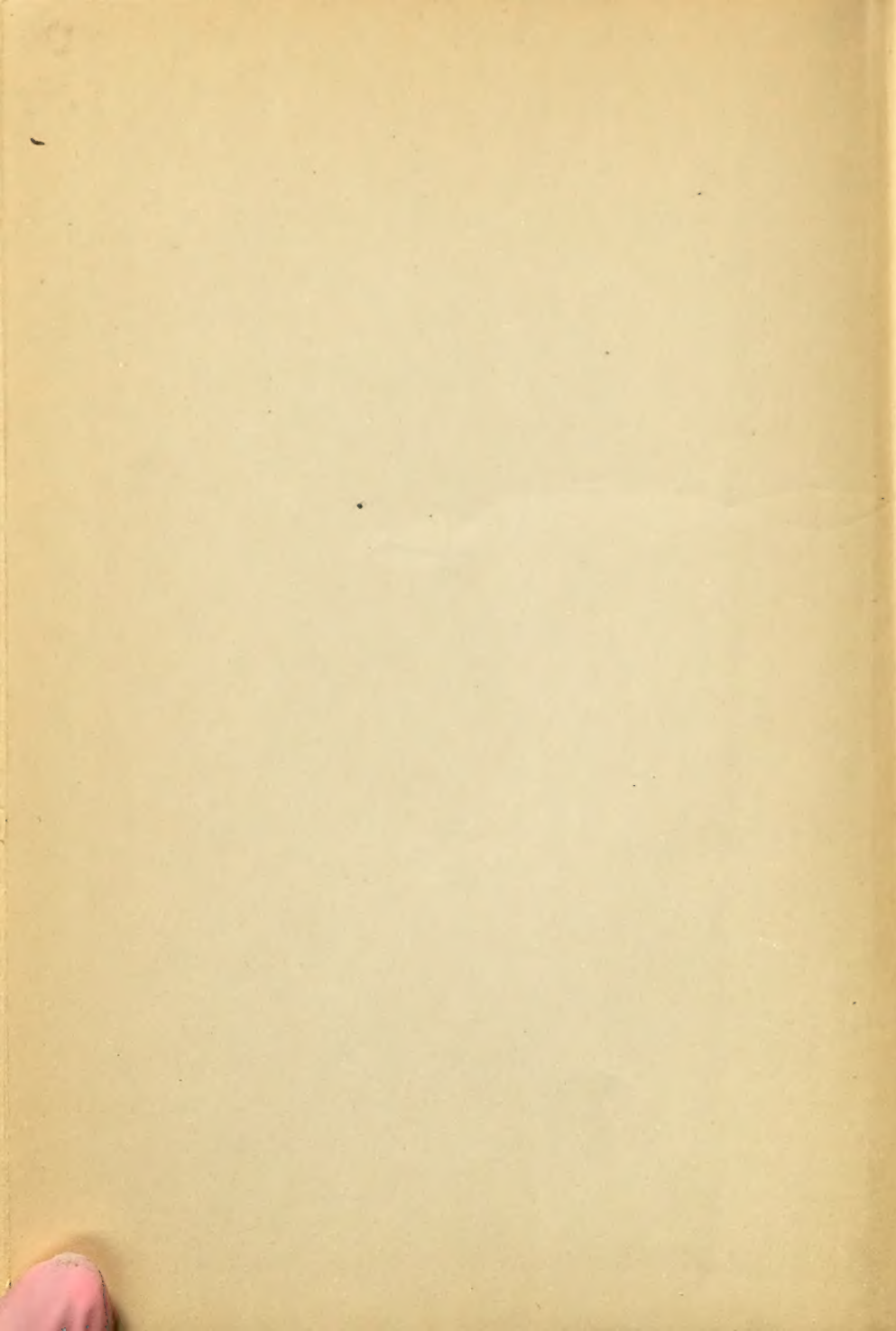
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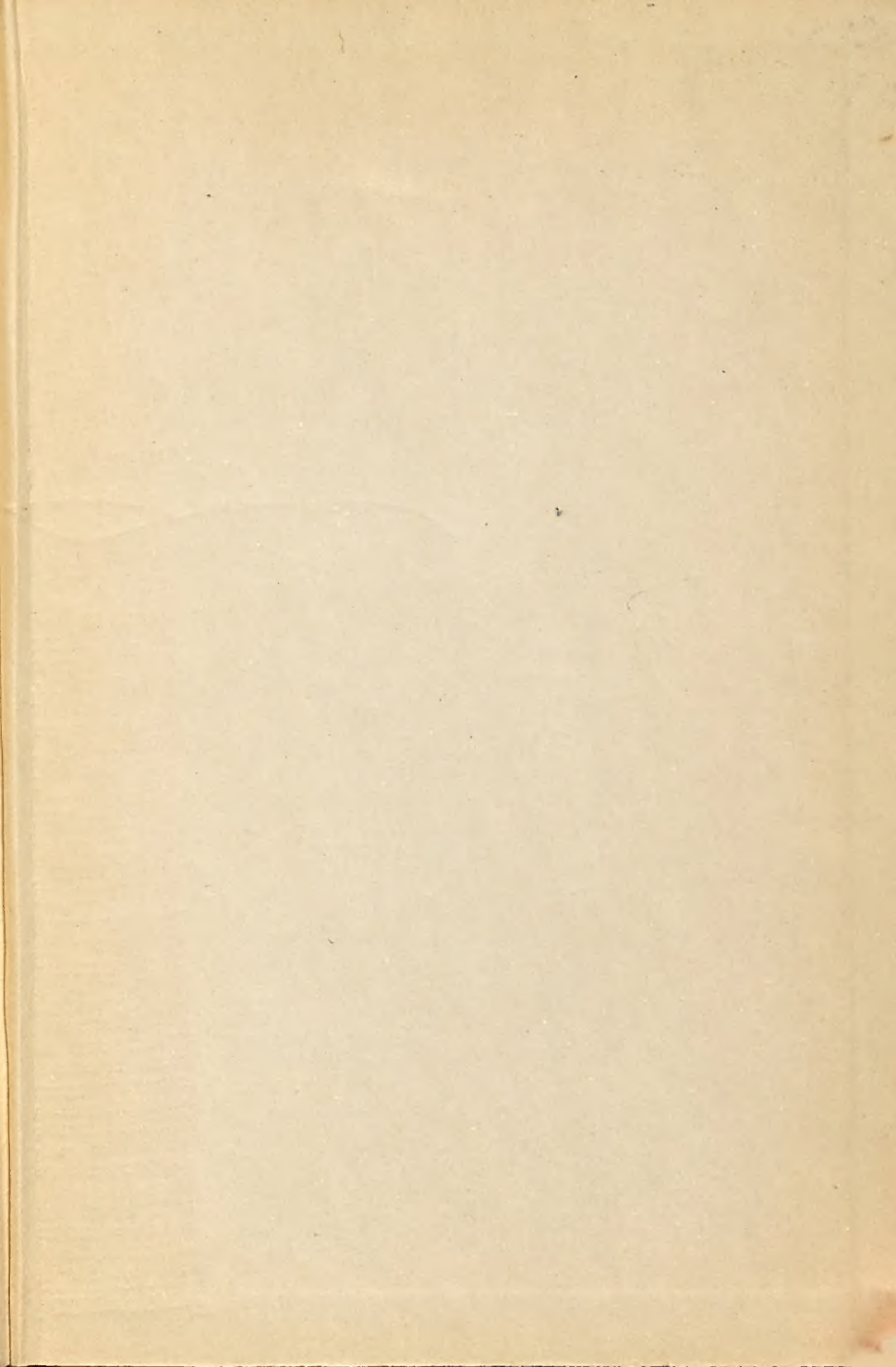
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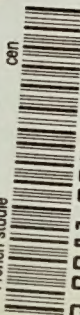




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